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ABSTRACT

Focusing on the multiple roles and situations of the world's women, this collection of articles examines the current status of women, throughout the world. In the first article, "It's Not as Simple as You Think" (John Richardson), women in Brazil and Costa Rica explain issues they face in the struggle to improve their economic and social status. In the second article, "If the Rains Don't Come" (Maggie Murray-Lee), the lives of two women in Chad illustrate the way many women there are reacting to the current African famine. Lindsey Hilsum then discusses the low priority society puts on the work of women in her editorial, "Women's Work Doesn't Count." In a fourth article, two women leaders from Burkina Faso and Peru provide testimony on their own experiences as community leaders and identify some of the tactics and qualities so important to good leadership. A fact sheet synthesizing data about the home, work, education, and health of women throughout the world, and a photo essay portraying the roles of women in various countries precedes "Give Us More Credit" (Sara Cameron and Manjula Giri), which describes the important role women in Nepal play in a program that provides credit to small farms. Remaining articles include "The Iron Rice Bowl Has Been Cracked" (Kim Lem); "Tradition Against the Law" (Sigrun Slapgard); "The Real Village Health Workers" (Wendy Wallace); "Where Mothers Make a Difference" (Diana Smith); "Laziness? Apathy? No...Anaemia" (Sue Kassirer); and an Executive Board update on UNICEF Women's programs. (LH)

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Power for the future: Women in the 1980s

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- It's not as simple as you think
- Give us more credit
- Tradition against the law
- Where mothers make a difference

UNICEF news

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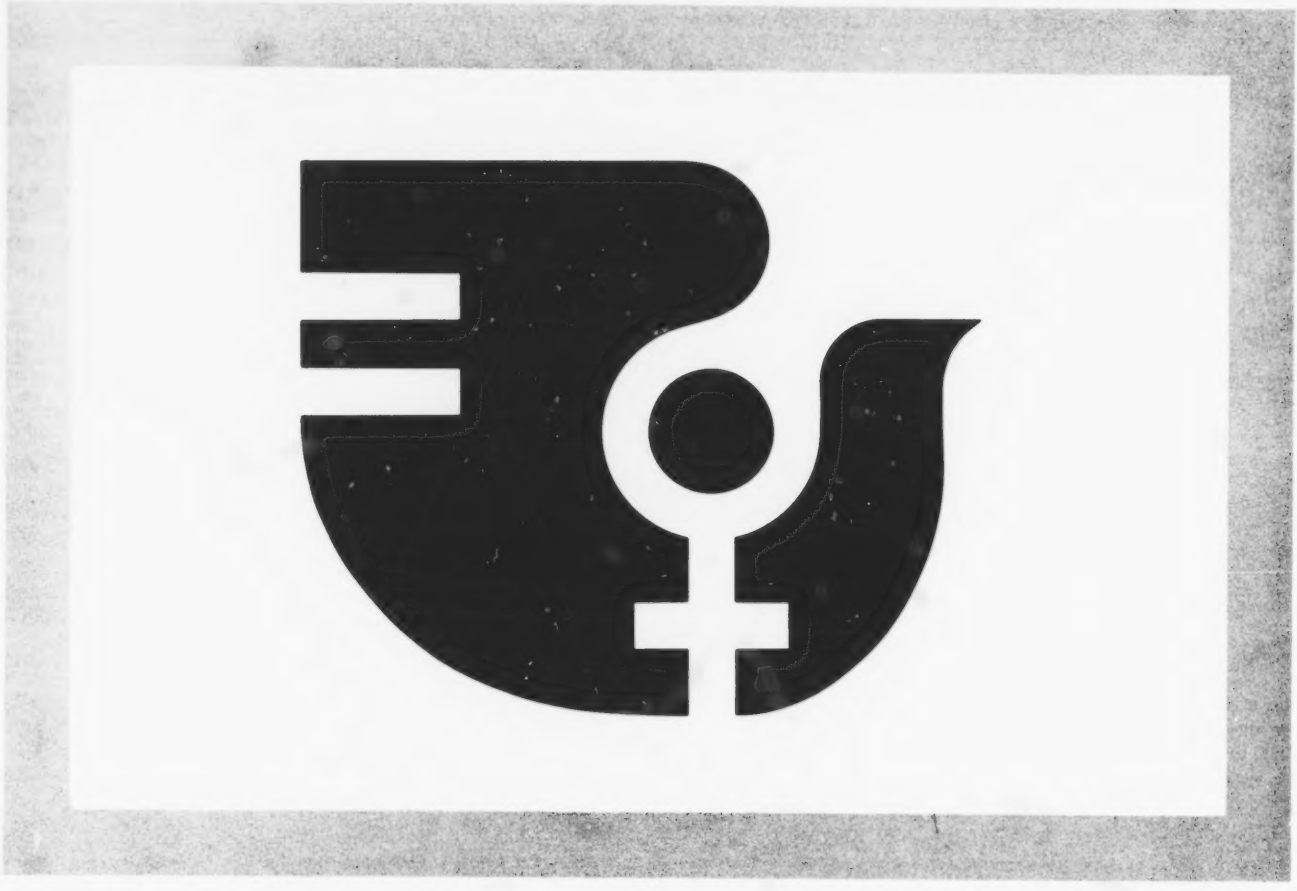
End of the Women's Decade 1975-1985



There's still a lot of work to do

International Women's Year in 1975 was a crucial year for many of the world's women. It drew attention to problems and opportunities long neglected and misunderstood. Women became the object of much study and a new focus for development projects. Many of them, inspired by women's movements in other parts of the world, began organizing for change in their own societies. Progress – at least some progress – was on its way.

But 10 years later the brief remains the same in much of the world. "Whether in the economy, education, health, or government," writes Ruth Sivard in her 'Women... A World Survey,' "there is no major field of activity and no country in which women have attained equality with men."

In truth, women have roles and needs that are not easily equated with those of men. They perform tasks essential to any society's survival – from raising children to growing food to feeding their families – that are taken for granted more often than not. Many ask not that men necessarily perform these tasks for them but that they display more understanding and willingness to share in

domestic work and child rearing. They also demand not just equal opportunities in education, social services, and employment, but equal financial reward for their work.

None of these demands are unreasonable, and there are many men who at least provide vocal support for the cause. But for generations in most of the world's societies, the men have been busy designing economic and political systems to fit their desires and needs while the women have stayed at home. Opportunities for education were intended for men who were preordained to exercise economic and political power. Women were simply not part of the plan. Not only have most men accepted this as the status quo, but until very recently most women have as well.

Now this is becoming increasingly unacceptable to many women – as well as highly impractical in many of the world's societies. Poverty demands that women work for money if they can, and the development of international communications and transportation systems have allowed more men and women to move about in search of work than ever before. Families – particularly in urban areas – are breaking up as men either leave in search of work or to escape financial and familial responsibilities they can't meet.

Women's choices are narrower. They still raise children, and for the most part do not experience the degree of social acceptance that men do in abandoning such responsibilities. Nor do women necessarily want to abandon them. Many would rather be given the kinds of assistance and opportunities they need to do a better job of being mothers and community members.

The extent to which women are involved in every aspect of social survival has become increasingly obvious to many – and has provided a focal point for some development programmes. They bear and raise children with minimal help from men in many parts of the world. They are responsible for both growing and preparing the food their families eat, often in societies where males get the lion's share of whatever food there is. They must maintain their children's health in situations where there is often neither sufficient understanding of health problems nor access to decent health care. They are also often responsible for seeing that their children get an education in societies where education is still a male prerogative and the girls stay at home to work in the fields or help their mothers with domestic chores.

Women are also prominent among the underemployed. Because increasing numbers are heads of their own households, many women must search for something to do that will earn them money. Because they have not had the right kind of education, or because they are unable to leave their children at home while they work, many end up as domestic workers or selling street food – neither of which guarantees them a wage. Even when they do work for money, they earn proportionally lower wages than men.

To go to the fields is almost a reflex, conditioned by the absolute lack of any other work. You go, even when you might not have to. The donkey needs fodder: you cut it by hand, sometimes just along the verges, and shove it into the sacks that hang from the saddle. While you're about it, you pull up wild greens for a salad – a little sorrel, dandelions, whatever there is. You weed your patch of wheat, you loosen the dirt around the beans, tie up a vine. You look over to see how your neighbor's crops are coming. Not really that you hoped yesterday's hailstorm had beaten them down, but there would be some justice if... You collect a few twigs for kindling. And finally at some invisible cue of light not yet changed but about to change, the long walk back to town. Five miles, ten – a long way with nothing to think about except how to get a bit more land, a job – how to feed your children. Your children. Will they live like this? You don't ride the donkey; he needs his strength too. The click of his hooves, the scrape of your boots and you almost fall asleep walking.

– peasant woman from Southern Italy, (source: **Women in the Shadows,** *by Ann Cornelisen)*

Finding solutions to these dilemmas has not been easy. Because women have not been part of the decision making processes when resources are allocated and social programmes are designed, they are left out of many programmes. But various women's programmes have evolved from rather specialized, often self-limiting efforts to draw attention to the problems, to programmes based on considerations of wider social issues. Many are now realizing that women are a component – very often the major component – of development efforts. Very few development programmes can succeed without the active involvement of women. Nor can they succeed unless they are based on a realistic understanding of women's needs and inclinations.

As more and more women give voice to their needs, it is also becoming apparent to many that there are a number of social problems – and responses – that women are in a unique position to understand. Not only do they identify the problems in the first place, but they are also the ones most likely to understand what ought to be done about them. Often what they need is assistance – technical and financial – and inspiration. They do not always need to be told either what the problem is or what to do.

While certain generalities are appropriate when assessing the status of women in the world, there are as many diversities as there are cultures – and there are always exceptions to the rules. Situations must be judged on their own if they are to be changed. Development programmes must be tailored to peculiar situations. The multiple roles and situations of the world's women provide perhaps the most apparent feature of the stories that follow – on midwives in Sudan, mothers in Indonesia, small farmers in Nepal, and famine victims in Africa. Responses and opportunities are different, from China to Zimbabwe to Brazil. But the stories are held together by the fact that they are about women – who suffer the burdens of oppression as well as the frustrations of still largely unfulfilled promise.

For women all over the world, 1985 is a year to celebrate achievements of the past decade, as well as an opportunity to carefully assess where to go from here. Because of advances over the past 10 years – with greater opportunities in the workplace, in health, and in education – there are now many more women than there were in 1975 who have the experience needed to move things forward.

And there is no doubt that this will happen. □

Brazil and Costa Rica

It's not as simple as you think

Beyond slogans and projects, women are fighting for their own space in societies around the world. To do this they must struggle with their interpersonal relationships, and develop effective social and political networks. They do this largely on their own. In both Brazil and Costa Rica, which have been held up as development models over the past quarter century, women's struggles help make the case that this is not as simple as many would like to think. By JOHN RICHARDSON.

With high economic growth rates in the early 1970s, Brazil challenged widespread pessimism that developing economies could not display the same capacity for growth that industrialized economies had. Costa Rica, in Central America, has been praised for its democratic political system and the surprisingly peaceful history it has had in a region of the world noted of late for excessive violence.

Now, much of the promise in both countries has soured. Brazil has the largest debt of any developing nation – 100 billion dollars – and inflation is running as high as 230 per cent. "There was no miracle," says one prominent Brazilian business woman. "We just had a stable economy for awhile."

In Costa Rica, governments are still brought to power through a rather peaceful and uncorrupted process of vote, but there is growing fear that as economic difficulties mount and the civil wars in Central America continue, the country will succumb by degree to the same problems their neighbours have so much difficulty solving. Some already see signs of regression.

But when women are considered, many claims of economic and social progress seem particularly difficult to support and make Brazil and Costa Rica no different from most other countries in the world. In both countries, close to half – and perhaps more of the population – are women. The majority of them are poor and powerless.

John Richardson edits UNICEF *News*

In Brazil, women's wages are 40 to 60 per cent those of men. Following the dictates of tradition, women occupy many of the socially most important but financially least remunerative positions – such as teachers, nurses, mothers, and social workers. They also occupy some of the dreariest – such as secretaries and domestic workers. They are the majority of minimum wage earners in a society where large numbers of them do not have a paying job at all.

But because families are breaking up under economic pressure and more and more women are left alone with children to raise, they are also the ones with the greatest responsibilities for shaping the character of future generations. Their limited education, high rates of illiteracy, relative inexperience in the job market, and general confinement to the routines of the home make the job exceedingly difficult for many of them.

In Costa Rica, the pattern repeats itself. Even in the socially more progressive organizations – the workers' unions that have been allowed to grow under democracy – women have not had much voice and it was not until very recently that the first woman joined the top leadership. While they have the vote, most of the country's women do not believe it necessarily gives them the political power they need to make dramatic changes in their lives. There is no guarantee that the people they vote for – the overwhelming majority of whom are men – will necessarily represent their interests, or even know how to. Without money, many say, political power is impossible – even in a supposedly democratic system.

Part of the problem can be attributed to the shortcomings of the programmes designed to address the problem. The majority of development programmes over the years have been designed and directed by men – who more often than not have either discounted the importance of women's needs or never even thought of them to begin with. The 'old boys club' that has run the development business, has displayed a general "lack of familiarity in dealing with women," according to Bob Berg, a former project evaluator with USAID. A "fear of doing things differently" has led to credibility problems. How can you have credibility, he asks, when you have token women sections in otherwise male dominated organizations? "Often it has taken a woman on the evaluation committee," he adds, "to raise the proper questions at all."

But the problem is also "buried in cultural behaviour," in the words of one Costa Rican health official. Both men and women, he says, "act without serious understanding of the problem. It's something very deep, and a lot more serious than we often think."

It was phrased somewhat differently by a Brazilian woman. "Brazil," she added after a lengthy assessment of the status of women in her country, "is still a very machismo society."

International Women's Year in 1975 introduced the issues, but the work is just beginning

In both Brazil and Costa Rica, many women leaders cite the International Women's Year of 1975 as the first time that the social and economic problems of women were sufficiently recognized to provoke constructive action. At the time, though, women were even more hampered than they are now by a lack of training and education. And they had little experience in organizing themselves.

The majority of the world's women, like those in the slums of Rio de Janeiro or on the co-operatives established in the past decade by former labourers on Costa Rica's fruit plantations, have learned by force of circumstance – which, in many cases, is the hard way. Through community projects and discussions about community life, many women are beginning to see their own problems – of poverty, marriage, economy – as representative of poor women everywhere. They are beginning to understand that their problems are not neces-

sarily their own fault, but reflections of greater social shortcomings that they themselves can help correct.

A UNICEF supported study conducted among a group of households in Rocinha, Rio de Janeiro's slum of some 80,000 people, reveals that more than half of the women surveyed do not work outside their homes for money. Close to three quarters of those who do list their occupation as domestic worker. Among the reasons for not working outside their homes, 65 per cent gave the need to stay at home to watch over the children. Of the women who do have jobs, some 20 per cent report leaving children under 12-years-old at home with no adult to take care of them. More than half of the first born children were to mothers under 20 years of age. And, of the women surveyed between 17 and 50-years-old, nearly half had not completed primary school.

As a result of the survey's house-to-house visits, many of the women were obliged to think about problems of sexuality, child care, education, and their own health that they had not considered previously. A number of them are now involved in discussion groups, where they learn more about the problems of other women like themselves who live in the community. "They have come to know about their bodies, their children, in fact about the whole woman," says Maria-Helena da Silva, head of the local neighbourhood organization.

The reality behind these statistics, though, is quite harsh, and helps put such efforts into perspective. Eliza Pirozzi, a community leader in Rocinha, counts close to ten different family situations that occur in slum life (see box) that often make the best intentioned efforts to improve upon them appear to be running against the current. They also form a solid case for the need to educate women and provide them with the tools needed to prevent further deterioration of family and community life – such as knowledge of home health care techniques and local schools to which they can send their children.

Some of the women involved in the UNICEF supported survey have begun to assert more control over their lives. They work as health workers, teaching other women how to use oral rehydration to combat diarrhoeal diseases among infants, and spend one day a week working at the local clinic. Others are involved in starting a community school. "We are no longer asking for favours," says Maria-Helena da Silva, "we are asking for our rights."

Many of the problems women need to overcome have their origins in their relationships with other members of their communities

The Coopesierra Cantilla in Costa Rica is a 900 hectare co-operative. Its members are 150 former labourers from a fruit plantation about 200 kilometres south of San Jose, the nation's capital. In the early 1970s, the men lost their jobs on the fruit plantation. Many were jailed when they and their families occupied land that belonged to the fruit company. Later, an arrangement was worked out with the government and the fruit company which allowed them to own the land.

Women earned the respect of many of the men for their support while the men were either unemployed or in jail. When it came to their struggles with the authorities, it was the women who often displayed the greatest strength. "Women are more courageous than men when it comes to facing police during a strike," says the male manager of the co-operative. Other men agree.

But when it came to the economic life of the community, men weren't so sure. Early projects that involved women were financial failures, largely because women had neither the skills nor the experience to make them successful. When further suggestions for women's projects came up, many of the men told them to stick to housework. They were afraid of losing money through the inexperience of women, says the manager.

Now, though, rising inflation and restricted markets have made many of the men realize that the survival of the co-operative may well depend on involving the women as producers too. When the younger women started leaving the co-operative because there was no work for them, the men got worried and decided they had better find something for them to do to keep them there.

But the problem of getting women involved still exists. One woman, Yolanda Duran, holds both men and women respon-

The family breakdown in Rio slums

In many urban slums, the family is in trouble. The best community programmes are designed to restore coherence and productivity to family life. Here are the impressions of one community leader in Rocinha, whose descriptions of different family situations provide a good sense of what some of the real challenges are:

1. **The mother is a prostitute without a husband. Her child is locked at home or is a streetchild.**
2. **The mother has no husband. Her child is kept in the house and eats off the floor.**
3. **The mother's husband is unemployed. She works and he cares for the kids.**
4. **Both parents (or just the husband) drink too much and the children are in the street.**
5. **The parents have enough money, don't care about their children.**

Rocinha, one of the many favelas (slums) of Rio de Janeiro's growing population. UNICEF/Hutchinson

6. **The parents do nothing but criticize and expect others in the community to do things for them.**
7. **The mother is old and alone. She lives with 6 children, no money, and drinks all day. She has no involvement or perspective.**
8. **Both parents work and can afford to buy toys and books for their children.**
9. **Only the husband works. The wife is a good mother who is worried about social problems. But reality prevails and her children end up delinquent anyway.**
10. **The family is wealthy but the child is ignored by the parents because he's rich.**
11. **The husband works and is involved in community affairs. She is a good mother to her children and to other children.** □

sible for resistance to change. Before the recent involvement of FECOPA, an association of co-operatives supported in part by UNICEF that encourages members to deal with their problems through discussion and self-critique, she really wasn't aware that the women in her community had problems. Now she is.

The men, she says, have not tried to understand the women's problems. They have kept them from working in the fields, claiming it is too difficult, but have done little to provide any alternatives to isolation in the home.

It is not just the men, though. Women don't make a sufficient effort either to let the men know what they are thinking. When FECOPA first came to their community, she says, the women should have discussed the need for more projects – like vegetable gardens – to provide the kinds of jobs that might have prevented the young women from leaving. They didn't. If they had, and they had fought for their own needs, this situation might have been prevented. There's a group of women who never come to meetings at all. It was, she says, largely the women's fault. But through the examples of a few, like herself, she thinks things will change – slowly.

A significant part of the problem is that women are simply timid, according to Margarita Lazara, who lives in the Indian community of Boruka high in the hills south of San Jose. "They've spent all their lives at home and haven't spoken to any outsiders."

Margarita is a member of a committee of female artisans learning to make traditional Indian clothes and household items that are in danger of disappearing as the community depends more and more on manufactured goods. While the committee exists to train women – a job done by the only woman in the community who still possesses the skill – it is the men who run it.

"Perhaps," she says, "the men think we are not capable, but the reality is that there are many of us who are just as intelligent. There are very few women who go to meetings because they're afraid to, but there are women who can do the work."

The president of the committee is her father. He thinks that men run the committee because women don't want to be involved, but says he thinks women should be more involved because their ideas often are better. But "most men are afraid the women will pass them, be more capable and intelligent, and then they'll lose their wives," he says.

Some women, though, like Luisa Ovarez,

"Perhaps men think we are not capable, but there are many of us who are just as intelligent," says Margarita Lazara. UNICEF 1068/ Richardson

one of the original members of the Coopevaquita co-operative near the Panama border, are not timid. The co-operative grew out of violent struggle in the early 1970s, when workers on fruit plantations in the area lost their jobs and tried to settle on company land. They were jailed, beaten, shot at, and the land was burned. Enough of them hung on, though, and with the support of the banana workers union in the mid-70s, they earned the right to own the land, which they started paying for by any means they could. Problems continued. They knew nothing about bank credit, and accumulated debts. They were swindled by people who sold them expensive but useless farming machinery. Even though the land they had cultivated began to yield enough food to live on, they had no water supply for the community and children were in bad health. Education for the children was a problem.

The co-operative itself was formed largely out of necessity, as a way of sharing meager resources and acting in solidarity. Men allowed women to work largely because the need for everyone's contribution was so great. Luisa was a pioneer, convincing a group of women to start raising pigs and using the funds for communal needs.

Because of Luisa's influence, FECOPA's recent involvement, and because the severity of circumstance gave them little choice, women in the co-operative are becoming more and more involved in community problems. They are learning about child health and nutrition, and about the need for safe water and better schooling for their children. Had they known about these things earlier, Luisa says, they might have been able to do something about the food shortages that prevailed during most of the 1970s.

But like most other co-operatives in Costa Rica – which by no means incorporates the majority of the country's poor, many of whom have much less social organization to support them – Coopevaquita continues to have problems. There may never be enough money to allow them to do what they would like. They are learning, and things are much better now than they were even five years ago, but the struggle is still very hard. "All of the co-operatives have problems," says one co-operative manager, "because they are co-operatives of poor peasants."

What is important about the co-operatives – particularly for women – is that

"Neither is a man greater than a woman, nor a woman greater than a man. But it is also not true the two are equal in everything. The reality is greater and more beautiful: the woman has qualities specifically feminine which when added to the qualities which are specifically masculine, allows the achievement of results which are greater, more expressive, and richer than any which could be reached if either of the two sexes were working separately."

Archbishop Dom Helder Camara
Recife, Brazil

The problems of rural women finally got on the agenda for discussion at state level in Brazil – in late 1984.

they give poor peasants a chance to exert some control over their lives, to make some decisions about their fate consistent with their needs and lifestyles. As one woman at a sewing co-operative in San Jose said, "the most important thing about the co-operative is that we are owners, we run it, and it gives us more confidence in ourselves. We don't have a boss. This is very important, because when we worked at the factory we couldn't get permission to see our children or take them to the hospital. Now we have more unity. We have met some objectives in life. We have goals and a sense of how to prepare for them."

Yet some of these women talk despairingly about their chances of securing greater influence in the larger society. At another sewing co-operative, just north of San Jose, women agree that they have much greater personal freedom than before. But they point out that many are working their because their husbands simply gave in to hard economic times and need whatever money their wives can bring in. As to their chances of ever having the kind of political influence needed to change laws or secure greater economic equality with men, they are skeptical. "There is simply too much machismo," one of them said. "Politics are run by men, and women are put in isolated positions."

The challenge for women, then, is to overcome positions of isolation – as housewives isolated from community affairs, as workers without economic power, as constituents without sufficient representation – and build networks which give them access to the people and resources needed to improve their lives. Co-operatives in Costa Rica represent one possibility, while taking responsibility for child health care and education in Rocinha is another. But ultimately these efforts need to be helped along and built upon by other women if genuine social change is to come.

Connections between poor women and those in power are a key to significant change

In Brazil, early efforts to promote women's issues often resulted in more talk than action, according to one feminist. Many women were political exiles in Europe during the 1970s because of Brazil's oppressive military government. There they began to organize around the issues identified by various women's movements in the European countries. When they returned to the country after an amnesty in 1979, many of them went to work in their communities or in various government agencies to see if they could help their own society recognize and respond to the needs of women. Today a number of them work with established agencies – like government welfare departments, the church, and international organizations like UNICEF – which help support efforts among the poor to raise consciousness and deliver tangible necessities like jobs, education, and improved health care.

As Brazil's military government gives way to civilian rule, attempts to use the system for social change will be easier. "Now we have a role in policy formation," says Eva Bley, President of the State Council for Women's Affairs in Sao Paulo. "Many of us decided consciously to go into politics, and the result was the creation of a council at the state level to deal with women's issues. We can use the existing structure and provoke action from the inside."

The Council is linked to unions, neighbourhood associations, and political parties. It advises women workers on how to start daycare centres, how to change worker laws and get maternity leave increased from three to five months, and how to get their issues on union agendas. It also plans to do something to increase women's wages. "In short," says Eva Bley, "we do things for them that they want us to do."

In Minas Geraes state, there is another state council for women's affairs – the only other one so far in Brazil – that was created with the support of Tancredo Neves, former governor of the state and now the civilian president-elect of Brazil. It is headed by Junia Marise, one of the few female state representatives in the country – in what is recognized by many to be one of the most conservative states.

The council, much like that in Sao Paulo, tries to change laws or create programmes that will help women deal with family violence, discrimination on the job, and low wages. But the system was not created, nor has it evolved, with these issues as its priorities. "So far, the justice system has not solved the problems of women," according to one council member.

In October 1984, with promotional and financial help from UNICEF, the council organized a meeting to discuss the problems of rural women in Brazil. It was the first time such a meeting was held at state level, and evidence of just how long it has taken for women's issues to get on government agendas at high levels.

With political changes in Brazil promising more attention to social issues than the country has seen in 20 years, many are getting optimistic about opportunities for change. Interest groups – including those like the state women's councils – will have more of an ear from representatives because for the first time in two decades the representatives will be dependent in part upon their votes. "These programmes will be much easier to fight for now than even a year ago," says one woman who works at the State Secretariat of Housing and Labour in Rio de Janeiro.

The state women's councils in Brazil are among many efforts being made by Brazilian women to change their social status and secure greater opportunity. They are also evidence – along with the women's group emerging in Rocinha – of how much progress has been made in the past 10 years. Examples can be found in other countries around the world although in many – including Costa Rica – the established social and political structures needed to support substantial change for women are still undeveloped.

There is no particular reason to expect that they will develop unless women see to it themselves – as evidenced also in the case of Brazil. Even though president-elect Neves has made it clear that he considers women's issues important, few women are anticipating miracles. "He will not give anything," says Eva Bley. "We will have to take it. He is giving us a space. Nothing more than this." □

If the rains don't come...

Women's responsibilities become particularly heavy during times of crisis. There are few places in the world where the situation is as difficult as it is in the many countries of Africa ravaged by famine. MAGGIE MURRAY-LEE gives us a simple, rather sobering look at the daily struggles of two women in Chad – where war, famine, and poverty make life difficult for all.

Zara's home is modest, but given the circumstances she may be lucky she has one at all.

It consists of four sticks stuck in the sand supporting a cover of straw matting. On the floor are two other straw mats, one in the process of fabrication. In a corner a cooking pot steams on the fire, its contents unground grains of wheat in boiling water. Cooking utensils hang from a stick and a couple of metal bowls lie in the sand. That is about all. Zara lives here with her three children – one seven, one six, and one still at the breast.

Like more than 200,000 other Chadians, Zara is a "displaced person," driven from her village a few miles away by the worst drought Chad has known in living memory. Her husband left months ago when his cattle died to seek work in the south, where the famine was not as severe as it was up north. She has not heard from him since.

When the village granaries ran out Zara joined other villagers and came to Méchiméré, a village with a food distribution centre in Kanem province, north of Lake Chad. They now live in two camps on sandy hillsides beneath the village. Their original homes lie abandoned in the dust and sand that has invaded the Kanem.

"In the old days," she says, "my husband provided for all my needs. He had 45 cows and grew millet on the slopes and wheat in the *wadis* (a natural oasis-like depressions with vegetation and a high water table). Now the cows are dead and my husband has gone."

Maggie Murray-Lee is an Information Officer in UNICEF's *Abidjan Office.*

Zara survives on international food aid. Her children get one meal a day at the UNICEF nutrition centre at the top of the hill. "Times are really hard," she goes on. "Food distribution is irregular and we are often lucky to have one meal a day." Most often the meals consist of a little ground corn or wheat in a porridge, or boiled whole wheat.

Every morning she goes to the well a kilometre away to fetch water. There are only two wells in Méchiméré for a population that has swollen fivefold because of the famine from 1,700 to almost 8,000. Often the queue is so long that by the time it is her turn there is no more water. So she tries the other well and again has to wait her turn.

After the water comes the firewood. For three hours she treks out into the bush for a commodity which is becoming increasingly scarce and farther and farther afield. Firewood is essential not only for cooking but for the fires needed to protect her children from the bitter cold at night. It is years since it has been so cold, the people say, and no one yet has received a blanket. However, she barters much of the wood with the villagers for a little grain. For the equivalent of one donkey's load of faggots (which she carries herself because she has no donkey) she obtains two koros of corn – about four kilos worth.

Daily struggle leaves her with little, but financial pressures demand further sacrifices

To help make ends meet, Zara now has to do work she never did before. Her day is busy, she says, because the simplest chore is so time-consuming.

She goes to pound grain with a mortar and pestle for the village women in return for a little additional wheat for her children.

Zara also sells the straw mats she makes for 250 FCFA (US$0.50) each, but this is not even enough for one koro of corn. "I came from the village on foot," she explained, "so I could only bring what I could carry on my head. I had to leave all the blankets, rugs and clothes behind."

Sahelian women are usually bedecked with jewelery, much of which they receive from their husbands as part of their dowry. Now only one simple necklace hangs round her neck. The rest she has sold for food.

When her children are sick – mostly with chest complaints because of the cold, she says – Zara takes them to the village dispensary. She does not think of sending them to school, though the village has one. Her eldest daughter, Aminata, maintains she wants to stay and help her mother because of the hardship.

Zara lives from day-to-day. Like many others consumed by the demands of simple survival, she cannot see into the future. When asked if it will rain next season, she shrugs and answers "only God knows." If it did rain, she would want to return to the village and plant millet, but it would take many seasons of rainfall to restore the land to what it was. She has no relatives with her besides her children, and like most of the other women in the camp has become a destitute, husbandless head of family.

There is, however, a gleam of hope for Zara's future. The Chef de Canton (traditional canton chief) is eager to start gardening projects in the nearby *wadi*, similar to those recently begun for displaced people in areas throughout the Sahelian region of Chad. In the Kanem alone, there are over 200 wadis, 90 per cent of which have not yet been exploited.

Wadis are parcelled into family plots, a well is dug in the middle of each, irrigation canals are built all around, and the plot is

As a result of spreading famine, many women now live in sandy relief camps, having abandoned their original homes. Photo: Murray-Lee.

divided into small sub-plots. Families are provided with seeds and basic tools. The work is laborious. First, the scrub has to be cleared, then the nail-hard ground has to be broken, and tilled and planted. Once the seeds are in the ground, the plots are watered morning and evening with the aid of a shadoof (a pole with a bucket and counterpoise) and a calabash that serves as a bucket. The women draw the water up and down in an endless rhythm, as the calabash is tipped into the canal and hauled back again.

Results are good. The ground is fertile from years of accumulation of animal feces, and groundwater in the Kanem is just beneath the surface. In one season at least three vegetable harvests can be reaped; wheat is also grown, even bananas and lemons.

The project will only work, though, if fresh water can be found. At present at least one well is salty because of the high sodium content of the water. (The Kanem is where the vast camel caravans come on their annual quest for salt.) If the project does work out, perhaps it will lure Zara's husband home.

Many who do not live in the camp cling to what is left of village life – but prospects are bleak

But not all of the women in Chad have left their villages because of famine. Some manage to hang on. One of them is Hawai. She lives in Moura, a village about fifty kilometres from Abéché in the eastern Ouaddai province on the road to the Sudan. Her home is a neat round hut in an immaculate compound; a similar hut next door serves as larder and kitchen.

Although the drought has driven almost half the village population away, Hawai has so far managed to cope. Apart from herself she has eight mouths to feed. Her husband has gone to live in another village with a second wife. Because of the drought, however, she does not blame him for no longer providing for his children. Last year there was no sorghum harvest at all, she said. All the villagers relied on food aid, but as in Méchiméré, distributions were irregular as were the number of daily meals.

Hawai works long hours. The nearest well is in the *wadi*. She gets up at dawn. If the available grain is only sufficient for the evening meal, she stays in the *wadi* all day. There she cultivates onions, garlic, and other vegetables for the canton chief who owns the land. In return she will receive some vegetables to add to the children's porridge.

Though Hawai's standard of living has dropped considerably since the drought, and her clothes are gradually wearing thin, her work in the *wadi* should pull her through until the next rainy season when she hopes to plant sorghum in the wide open fields. But what if it does not rain? Unlike the Kanem, the Ouaddai *wadis* can only be cultivated for three months a year. After March it is simply too hot. And the water table is not constant like that of the Kanem. Over-exploitation could deplete its resources.

Unanswered questions make it difficult for her to assess her future. How long can she live off the *wadi*? How long can she rely on food aid? What does the future hold in store for her eight children? In Moura, there is no school, no dispensary. Will Hawai finally be forced to join her fellow villagers in their flight?

Zara and Hawai are not exceptions among Chadian women, nor are they even exceptions in the Sahel. Their uncertain future is shared by countless numbers of women who from Senegal to Chad find themselves in a similar plight of having to face the problem of survival alone. Their resilience and resourcefulness are characteristic of the people of these regions. Each one has adapted to the difficult circumstances and found the means, however meagre, to help her family survive. But unless the rains return, or food production projects constitute a viable solution, the end of hardship is not in sight for Zara and Hawai. □

Women's work doesn't count

One of the hidden stories behind the African famine concerns the role of women as cultivators of basic foods – like maize, beans, and vegetables. LINDSEY HILSUM argues that because women's work is undervalued in a society interested in the income from cash crops, the kinds of foods Africans eat are decreasing in quantity – and many are starving as a result.

In Kenya today, as in much of Africa, "work" has become synonimous with earning money.

On the whole, women support the subsistence economy, growing food for the family to eat, bringing up children, fetching water and wood – in short, doing all the daily tasks which keep a family going. No one denies that the tasks are essential, but because they do not involve money, they are not seen as "work" and are subsequently undervalued.

Providing the family's food is the African woman's most important task, and 80 per cent of the continent's food production is carried out by women. Yet, although the women are working just as hard – if not harder – than before, from Mozambique to Mali, from Swaziland to Sudan, each year yields less.

Why should this be? One reason is that as women's work is undervalued, so is it unsupported. The schoolteacher is not the only one to put earning money above growing food – so do many agricultural extension workers, government planners, and aid agencies.

The clearest examples occur in areas where cash cropping has taken over from food production. "When I was a child, the lands around my home were full of yams and maize and sweet potato," said a friend from Kenya's Central province. "Now, it's all flowers for export. It's good money, and fast money, but women find it increasingly difficult to feed their families from the diminishing plots available."

Lindsey Hilsum is an Information Officer in UNICEF's Nairobi office.

It was a trend established during colonial times, when Africans were encouraged, or in some places forced, to grow cocoa, coffee, cotton, tea and other crops for export to the colonising country. The colonisers, with their Victorian concept of "men's work" and "women's work," directed such programmes at the men, while encouraging women to concentrate on household tasks and child care.

Catapulted into a cash economy, African families were suddenly expected to buy food instead of grow it as they had previously. But there was rarely enough money after taxes had been paid. And, whereas women had controlled the whole process, from planting to cooking, now men were in charge of money. Feeding the family was not necessarily their first priority.

Modern African states, desperate for foreign exchange to cover the cost of oil and other imports, have continued to expand the land given over to cash crops. In one rice growing scheme in East Africa, no land at all was set aside for women to grow food crops. The nutritional status of children declined, according to one study, and a large number of women left their husbands because they could not grow the maize, beans and vegetables they needed. In other similar schemes, women have been expected to do the weeding or sowing of the cash crops, leaving them less time for cultivating food.

Even agriculture itself requires cash. Gone are the days when land was so plentiful you could move to a new plot for a few years, leaving the old one fallow. The increase in cash cropping, combined with expanding towns and population increase, has meant that people must cultivate more intensively on smaller plots. To do so, they need higher yielding varieties of seed, which in turn need fertilizer. It all adds up to money.

One Zimbabwean woman summed up the problem when she said, "We know nothing about credit and loans. What we know is that we need money to improve our farming." But banks are often loathe to give credit to women because they have no collatoral. Although women work the land, the title deeds are usually in the man's name. Another Zimbabwean woman pointed out, "credit and loans are given to men only. But women also need farming credit to buy fertilizer."

Men own the land which women work, raising serious questions about who establishes the priorities. A Zimbabwean woman explained, "We don't have control over the land; the land is controlled by men. I say so because we are given two and a half acres to plough, but our husbands do not allow us to plant anything else except maize. So where shall we plant monkey nuts, beans and fruit that are good for our families?"

If men's priorities are often cash rather than food, and women disagree, there is little outside support that women can muster. Agricultural extension officers tend to be men, and they talk to men rather than women. And, reflecting government policies, they tend to advise on cash crop cultivation rather than food production.

There are many ways of addressing the problems African women are facing in their struggle to maintain food production. More support for women's farming, in the form of credit, improved agricultural tools, access to seed and fertilizer, would be a start. In some countries this is already happening on a small scale.

Training more women agricultural extension officers, and gearing "women's projects" to food production rather than domestic tasks and handicrafts would

Oh yes it does!

We are in a bar, in a small town in rural Kenya.

A few men are drinking standing up, while others are sitting at the green painted chairs and tables. There are just two women in there – myself and the barmaid.

"In my village, the women fetch water and firewood, look after the small animals, and take care of the house and children," says a schoolteacher as he takes another sip of warm beer.

"The women dig the *shamba* (family plot)," he continues. "They are doing planting. Except that now we have drought, of course, so there is no planting, and they have to go very far for water."

"What are the men doing?" I enquire.

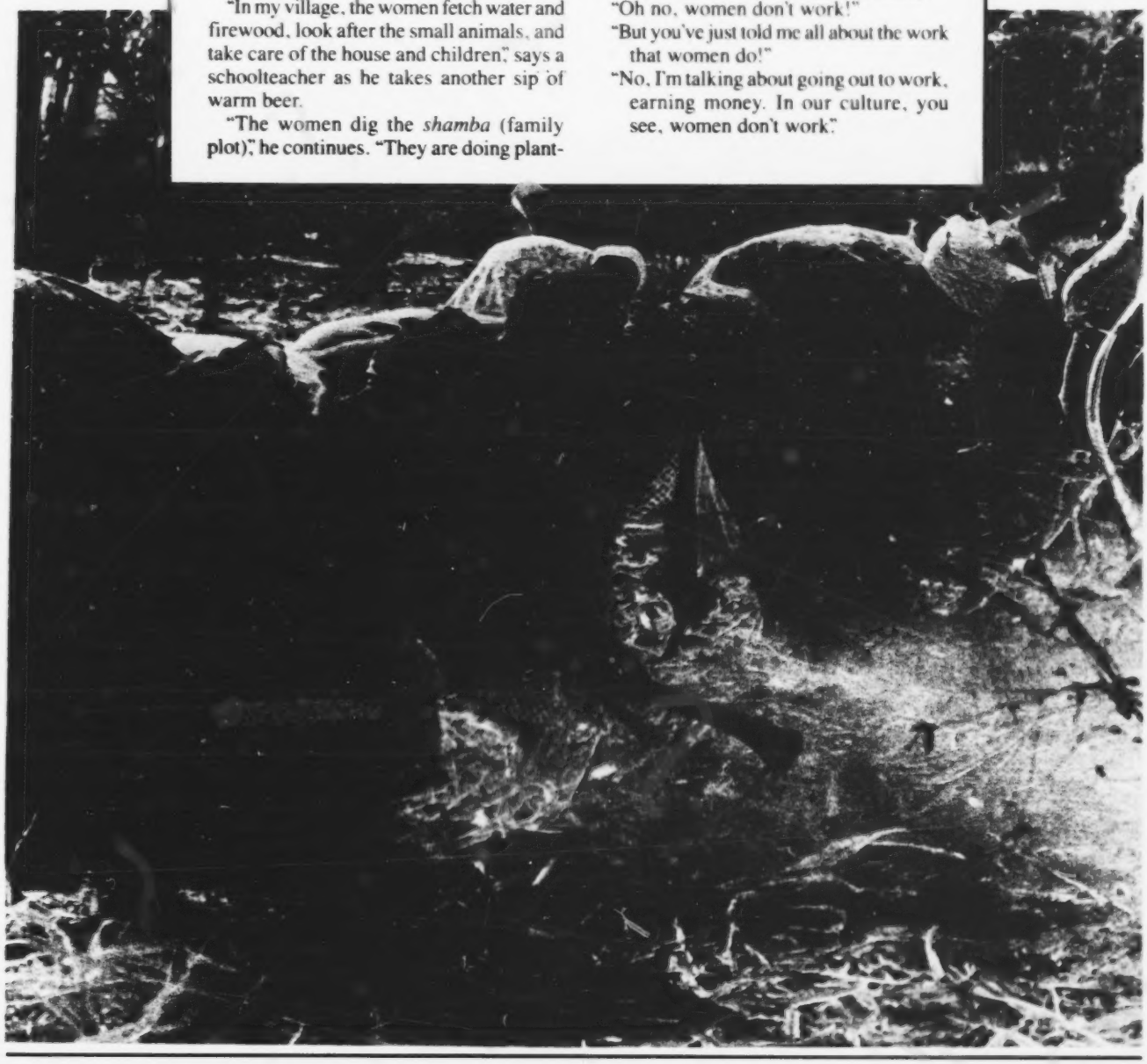
"The men? Well, we work."

"Isn't that what the women are doing?"

"Oh no, women don't work!"

"But you've just told me all about the work that women do!"

"No, I'm talking about going out to work, earning money. In our culture, you see, women don't work."



be a major policy change for many governments, and one which would greatly improve their chances of regaining food self-sufficiency.

It requires a change in attitudes to women's work. As long as what women do is seen as not terribly important, or not worthy of the title "work," no-one is going to take it seriously. Yet women themselves are well aware of their worth; said one Tikar woman from Cameroon: "A woman is an important thing. A man is a worthless thing indeed, because a woman gives birth to the people of the country. What work can a man do? A woman bears a child, then takes a hoe, goes to the field, and is working there. She feeds the child." □

A little courage and imagination go a long way

Most women ultimately have to go through a difficult process if they are going to gain control over their communities, families, and selves. There are many ways in which this occurs, from the crowded slums of Latin American cities to the nomadic villages of the Sahel. Sometimes, exceptional women who become leaders in their communities both inspire and educate other women about their capacities and strengths.

Two of these women – Lucie Kabore of Burkina-Faso and Carmen Masias of Peru – provide testimony on their own experiences as community leaders, and identify some of the tactics and qualities so important to good leadership.

"It's those situations where they are forced to do things they might otherwise not do that make women feel they can't do it. That is also when their true capabilities come out." ICEF 8863/Lippman

After Lucie Kabore lost her husband in 1972, she founded the Widows and Orphans Association, which was recognized by the Voltaique government in 1977. The Association trains widows in various skills that will give them some measure of economic self-sufficiency.

The African widow's primary role is one of submission. Tradition dictates that a wife become an object of inheritance along with land and money upon the death of her husband. She is inherited by a male of the husband's family and is required by tradition to marry her husband's brother or uncle. If she refuses, she is ostracized from the family, losing all her material goods as well as her children. Tradition also holds that the death of a man is caused by the wife; widows are therefore often labelled as sorceresses. One of the most unpleasant rites that a widow must go through is having her head shaved when she loses her husband. Men do not have their heads shaved when they lose their wives.

When her husband died, Lucie was left with 10 children.

One day she was watching a little boy who was sitting in the sand. He was paralyzed. His brother was getting water from the well for his mother. The little boy was throwing handfuls of sand at his brother. But his brother was getting perturbed, and was ready to start beating up on the little one. Lucie ran to the little one's rescue.

She went with the little boy to find his mother. When she arrived she asked the boy's mother, "Madame, what's wrong, can't you find some kind of cure for your little boy?" The only way the little boy could get around was on two hands and two knees. The mother said, "Madame, I have nine children. I'm a widow. I've lost my husband, I have no means of income and the only way I can make money is by selling doughnuts in the market. I can't leave the other eight children to starve while I go looking after this one who can't walk. At least he's not starving."

The next time Lucie went to a meeting with the committee which was dealing with the drought in the north, she said, "Look here, we have all this money, we're sending it all up north to these people, but I have a woman in my own backyard who is starving. Isn't there anyway you can give me some of this money so I can use it in Ouagadougou?"

Then she went to the public officials and asked them how many widows there were in the country. She also went to visit the traditional town chiefs. The towns are all broken up into traditional quarters. She asked the quarter chiefs if they knew how many widows were in their area. She also went to the military and asked them if they knew how many widows there were from people who had died in the military.

Everywhere she went people were able to tell her "there are many widows because often when a man dies he'll leave three, four or five widows." They know that there are

These are edited versions of interviews provided by the International Community Leadership Project in Boston, Massachussets in the United States.

many but no one could tell her how many. No one had counted. She said she went to the Catholic missions and said "find me 10 good women who are widows with whom I can begin this association." So she found 10 widows and that's where she began. This was December 1974.

Fighting against tradition

At first it was difficult because the women were afraid. "The men are going to be angry at us, the women are going to be angry at us," so many said. "Look, we don't want to hurt anybody," she explained. "We simply want to talk to people, to find out what's going on. Then, for people who want to listen to us, fine, it's a beginning." Soon they got grain and millet. Then they started having administrative problems. Once they got the grain they said, "great, now that we've got this grain, where do we put it? How do we distribute it?" It was distributed through the association. This was something to get them going.

They have had many problems. Because they are supposed to marry their husband's brothers, widows are no longer considered widows. It's a question of fighting against an attitude, a very deeply entrenched tradition. They had problems trying to get people to even recognize that there are widows.

The objective of the association is to provide training so that widows can work and buy their own food, their own clothing, and be self-sufficient. Perhaps the greater goal of the association is to change the laws, to secure rights for widows. It's not a question of being vindictive, she says. The law needs to be changed and the rights of the widow need to be recognized. But the women cannot do this until they can be economically self-sufficient, and until they are educated enough so that they can struggle for the rights themselves.

The first thing the widows said when they got together was, "what are we going to do? We're going to learn to use our ten fingers."

The projects they started with were more or less traditional projects. There's one group that makes peanut oil, which is traditional practice, there's another group that makes butter from a local tree called the karite, another group that weaves blankets, and a fourth group that does sewing. Then all together they have a literacy course. She's helping them to learn to read and write.

Every woman can be a leader

Lucie Kabore's success at starting the widow's organization can be attributed in large part to her own qualities as a leader. Here is what she has to say about what qualities make a good leader:

"A good leader must have patience. This is first on the list. Patience with the people you're working with, patience with the people whose attitudes you're trying to change, patience with yourself.

"Second, don't ever let yourself be too discouraged. You need to have courage to keep going when people tell you you can't do this or that, or when people come up to you and give you all sorts of problems.

"Third, you have to have the ability to stand outside of it all, to be above it all. Don't take it so personally that you allow people or problems to stop yourself from doing what it is you're doing. You need to be objective enough to keep going and this takes courage.

"Fourth, you have to be able to adapt yourself to a given situation. Situations aren't always going to be exactly what you would have them be. You must take what you have to work with and adapt it to your own needs, according to what is available to you.

"A leader has to have a lot of imagination. You will often be confronted with situations where you can't get what you need or what you really want so you have to have enough imagination and creativity to find alternative ways of doing things. For example, a woman is rolling up her thread and the bobbin breaks. And the woman comes and says 'what can I do? What can I do? There aren't any bobbin stores.' Well, you use a straight pin, you use a tin can or whatever you've got. You use your creativity and imagination. I'm not a mason but I've got a trowel at home to touch up parts around the house. And that's not the normal job of a woman in our society.

"I'm trying to say that women are capable. Every woman is capable of being a leader. It's those situations where they are forced to do things they might otherwise not do that make them feel they can't do it. That is also when their true capabilities come out."

Psychologist Carmen Masias of Peru works in Asociacion Peru Mujer. It was founded to support projects directed especially towards children and women from the poorest areas of Peru. The organization's projects provide training for community leaders, student internships, and legal education to people living in marginal urban sectors. They also include a radio programme addressing issues facing women and their families.

What do you do?

"We use drama. We go to the community with a theatre group, a popular group, and we start in the streets and people come. The drama presents aspects of women's lives. For example, a boss woos his secretary. Or sometimes two women are fighting and then they start to talk. Then, we do a diagnosis of the situation. After the theatre we ask the people watching what kinds of problems there are. Through this dynamic people get the point.

"We work with a group called Ricaldo. They work in shanty towns. I don't know how they survive because they get so little money, but they work hard. They present the play in a closed place, an open place in the shanty towns, or in a school. Sometimes we present a play at nightschool.

"We also have a project at a government school. A project in nutrition, sex education, civil rights.

"We work mostly with women but we invite the men leaders to speak in the workshop because I think it's necessary to integrate them. They are very proud of the women and assist when we need them.

What is your goal?

"I think the women have to prove to themselves that they can do something for the community and for themselves. You can't imagine. Some women don't know how they got pregnant. They really don't. So we start working with them. The work provides something tangible for the communities.

"For example, literacy training. My experience is that you can't do a programme, you can't be successful, if you don't have another

programme. Because if they don't use the alphabet, if they don't write or read, it's impossible to pretend that they will maintain or develop what they've learned.

"When you talk about family planning with the campesina, for example, the campesina often says 'oh no, I want to have eight or nine children' because she knows that only two will survive. That means that we have to work not only in family planning but also in preventive health. For the children. Not only for women.

Is there any special way in which you work with women?

"The way we approach the women is with children first. When women see we are affectionate and kind with children they accept us. It's not easy work.

What is your greatest difficulty?

"The most difficult thing is to train teachers. One teacher thought that if a woman grew peas she could get pregnant. Imagine! A teacher! And this teacher is in charge of the orientation of the women.

"So we need to train teachers. And we need to train them in participatory methodology. When they use formal lectures people at the school say, 'no, no, no, we want to participate, we want to talk.' I think we must start with the learners in order to change stereotypes.

What are the students' greatest difficulties?

"The students have no information and they don't have an adequate curriculum. The curricula is very formal, and not adapted to life.

"They also have difficulty abstracting. Most of the students who come at night work all day at home because they are servants. Then they go to school for four or five hours a night. If you don't use participatory methodology, they fall asleep. They have none of their own time. They have no other experiences. Only work and then this course. The situation of the domestic workers is bad – they earn $60 a month, maybe $80 if they are lucky.

Do you think education by itself is enough?

"I think education raises consciousness about the situation as women, as persons, as citizens of a country. I don't think that education is the whole answer, though.

"In Peru-Mujer, for example, we are working in a shanty town with 90 women. And 60 of them have tuberculosis. We are trying to provide an alternative. But how can you get these people motivated if they have tuberculosis? It's very difficult. And I'm only talking about one portion of the shanty town.

"I don't know how much tuberculosis there is but this is reality. These women are receiving food from the government. We think that food in the short term is acceptable but in the long term it doesn't resolve the problem. Food donations create dependence.

How do you get people beyond dependence, then?

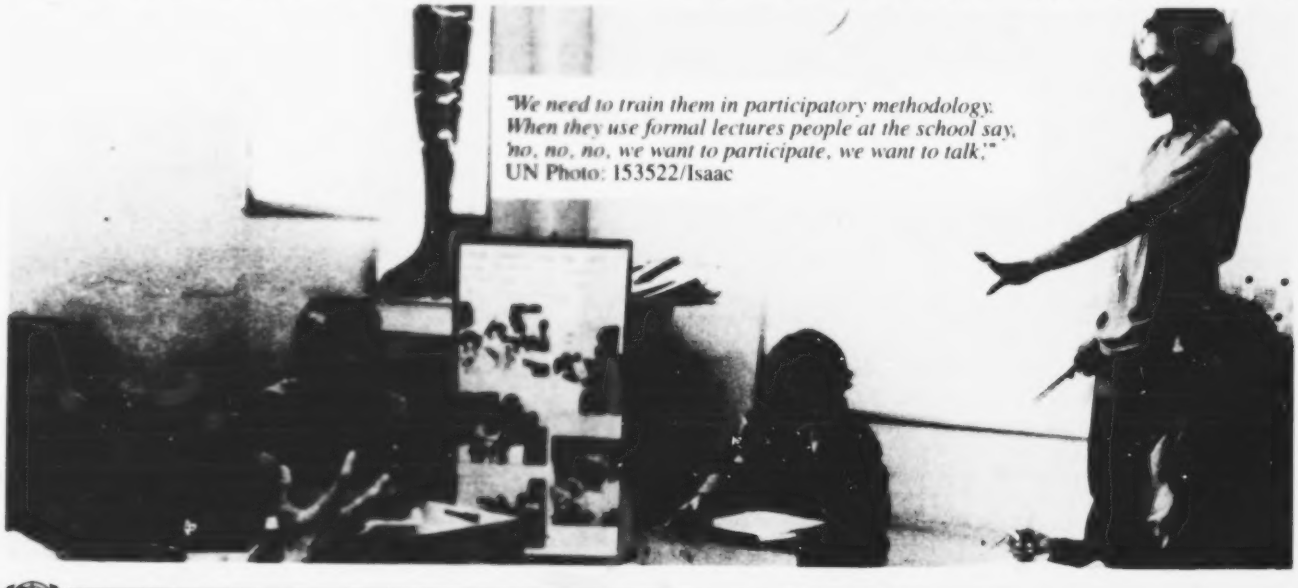
"We're thinking in terms of setting up a popular dining room or food co-operatives. But sometimes, women are afraid of something new because they don't know how to do it. So I think we need to work more in self-conscientization, to give power to people, to show them they can do anything that they want.

"We don't force them, though. If a community decides one thing, they do it. I don't think that one intermediary group can push people and decide for the group. But at the moment, we don't have this kind of problem. We almost had a consensus because I think they believe in our work. They ask us to facilitate, to help them, to teach them. We never go into a community if we haven't talked it over with them.

"All in all, I think it's necessary for people who are working in community development to exchange experience, to exchange methodologies. To see other realities and to meet people who are trying the same things they are. I think they need reinforcement. It's necessary because they get tired sometimes.

Don't you get tired sometimes?

"I have to fight with myself sometimes to keep going. But what am I going to do? You must not renounce the other things in life – love, sex, beer, theatre, books. But I hope that someday the people of my country can get books, not only beer." □



"We need to train them in participatory methodology. When they use formal lectures people at the school say, 'no, no, no, we want to participate, we want to talk'."
UN Photo: 153522/Isaac

Women in the 1980s: the facts

Women and home

Women are the world's caretakers of the home. The majority work with little or no financial reward for as many as 18 hours a day. They perform a variety of tasks without which families and communities would simply collapse.

They grow and prepare food, often walk several kilometres to obtain water for drinking and other household needs, and worry about their family's health. In many societies they make the homes from materials they themselves weave. They also make the clothes their families wear. All too often they haven't either the time or the opportunity to seek the education and training they need if they want to improve their knowledge of health care or qualify for a paying job. The job of homemaker is for too many women a grueling, rather thankless one.

The number of households in the world that are headed by women is increasing. These households tend to have lower incomes, less access to productive resources, more children, and fewer secondary sources of income than male-headed households. As economic problems in the world mount, and more people compete for fewer jobs, men tend to leave families that they can no longer support. As a result, women are left with heavy responsibilities and very little in the way of resources needed to meet them.

For many of the world's women, the home is no longer a stable environment. Over the past 25 years, increasing numbers of them have migrated from rural to urban areas. Others like those in famine-stricken Africa move from areas of violence or ecological disaster to refugee camps or slightly more prosperous settlements. Those who do arrive in cities are looking for jobs and improved pay and living conditions. What they often find are higher costs of living, discrimination, exploitation, and problems caused by cross-cultural differences. As migrant workers they occupy the most strenuous, monotonous, dirtiest, and lowest paid jobs.

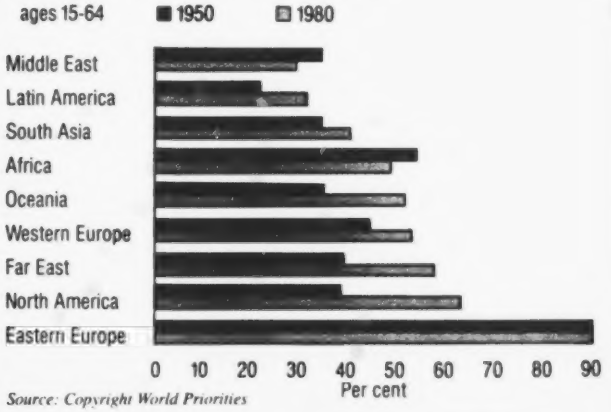
- **In the Dominican Republic the influx of women migrating to cities is four times the rate of men.**
- **In India, which has one of the world's largest populations, women's migration rate to cities also exceeds that of men.**
- **In Africa, more and more women are moving not just to cities, but from their homes to other parts of their countries as they flee war and famine.**

Sources consulted include: **Women...A World Survey,** *courtesy World Priorities;* **Women in Development: A Resource Guide for Organization and Action,** *courtesy ISIS, International Centre for Research on Women; International Women's Tribune Centre.*

Women and work

LABOUR

Women as a per cent of men in the paid labour force, by region



Source: Copyright World Priorities

WAGES

Women's hourly earnings in manufacturing as a per cent of men's

Source: Copyright World Priorities

INFORMAL SECTOR

Many women have neither the education nor the skills to work in formal, wage paying jobs. They turn instead to more informal ways of earning the money they need for themselves, their children, or as a complement to their husband's wages. Many do domestic work for other families – such as washing clothes, cleaning house, and cooking. Others work in the streets, selling fruit, cakes, grains, or candy. They work all day, often without protection from the weather or access to running water. Those working in the street are often subject to attacks from shopkeepers who resent their competition and the fact that they don't pay taxes. They have no medical insurance, no holidays, and no regular working hours. Often they risk being picked up by the police. Yet there are advantages. They work their own hours. And, perhaps most importantly, they can bring their children to work with them. **According to figures from the mid-1970s, 54 per cent of the workers in the informal sector in Belo Horizonte, Brazil were women. In Salvador, Brazil, over 56 per cent were women. In Peru, 46 per cent of working women were in the informal sector, while in Cordova, Argentina 63 per cent were in the informal sector.**

Women and health

INFANT MORTALITY

Women begin life with a greater chance of survival than men, but lose it quickly. Overall mortality rates at birth for girls are lower than those for boys, and equal to those of boys between the ages of one and two. But by the time they reach five, girls' infant mortality rates run double those of boys. Why? Because in allocation of food and health care, boys get most of the attention.

CAUSES OF DEATH

Leading causes of death (by percentage)

	15-24	25-44
CENTRAL AMERICA		
Accidents	16.2	8.1
Pregnancy	10.0	9.3
CARIBBEAN		
Accidents	32.3	27.8
Pregnancy	5.9	3.6
TROPICAL SOUTH AMERICA		
Accidents	16.8	8.6
Pregnancy	11.8	11.2
SOUTH AMERICA		
Accidents	22.9	10.2
Pregnancy	7.4	5.5

(Note: Other includes heart disease, tumours, influenza, diarrhoeal disease, tuberculosis, cerebo-vascular disorder, homocide, and suicide.)

Source: Pan American Health Organization.

CHILDBIRTH

One of the most meaningful measures of a woman's access to health care is whether or not she has professional help during childbirth. Since the largest overall percentages of women's health problems are a result of complications during pregnancy and childbirth, this is a particularly significant factor.

- **In 1978 in Paraguay, 34.9 per cent of recorded births were unassisted by professional care.**
- **In 1978 in Uraguay, where there is a large urban population, only 3.8 per cent of recorded births were unassisted by professional care.**
- **In 1977 in El Salvador, a very poor country with a high infant mortality rate, 39.7 per cent of recorded births were unassisted by professional care.**

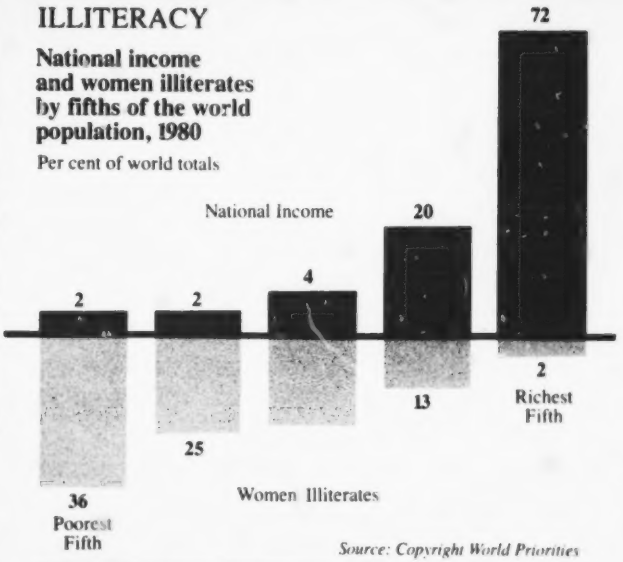
Source: Pan American Health Organization.

Women and education

ILLITERACY

National income and women illiterates by fifths of the world population, 1980

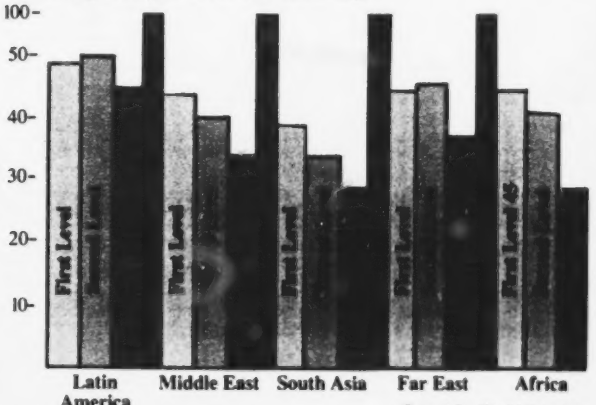
Per cent of world totals



Source: Copyright World Priorities

SCHOOLS

Girls as percentage of total enrollment (1982 figures per level of schooling)



Copyright: World Priorities

VOCATIONAL TRAINING

With more and more women around the world looking for paying jobs, vocational or technical training is crucial to their success. In most countries they comprise a minority of those receiving such educations.

High school aged girls as percentage of overall enrollment in vocational and technical secondary education (1976).

Argentina	47.6%
Singapore	27.5%
Nigeria	13.8%
Zaire	35.4%
Brazil	43.1%
Sri Lanka	33.4%
Indonesia	27.2%
Burkina Faso	36.3%

Source: UN Statistical Yearbook 1977

A WOMAN'S WORLD: A LITTLE OF EVERY

Women lead demanding lives, often working constantly to take care of family and community responsibilities. They get water for their families (1), sell and buy food at the market (2), and run their own small businesses to earn a wage (3 and 4). They bear the major responsibility for their children's health. They have them immunized (5), breastfeed them (6), or provide day care for the children of other working mothers (7). Many of them also teach important skills to other women (8), or learn the skills they need to earn their own living (9 and 10).

HING

Give us more credit

One of the fundamental problems experienced by women who try to make money with their own businesses is their trouble getting – and repaying – loans. Often regarded as bad credit risks or denied loans because they are women, they seldom get the chance to prove themselves to the contrary. SARA CAMERON and MANJULA GIRI show that a sensible government programme combined with community enterprise can go a long way toward allowing the poor – many of whom are women – opportunities for financial success and the self-respect that comes with it.

At dusk in the village of Kakarbhitta on Nepal's southern plains a young woman is singing.

"Everywhere in the world,
life is changing.
But not for we women of the village.
We must remain here,
so far from the world,
Where everything stays the same."

The melancholy voice drifts over the thatched roofs that smoulder with smoke from the evening's cooking fires, and out into the vast darkening sea of rice paddies.

It is easy to feel that this place is stuck in time. The sights and sounds of dusk on the Terai plains must have stayed the same for generations; but impressions can be misleading. The song is not really about the lack of change in the village; it is an expression of frustration that change just isn't happening fast enough.

The following morning the usual crowd of young women and girls are gathered around the new water pump. Sita Devi is also there, pronouncing sentence upon the advantages of youth. Sita-ji ('ji' is an honorific denoting respect) is a tiny, wizened woman who is rumoured to be at least eighty-years-old.

"Ha! When I was a girl I could not even look upon the face of my husband's brother. You see these girls today? They talk to everyone, even to strangers. They go to meetings. They even walk out in the night. This was not permitted when I was a girl. These young women today, they have ideas. You listen to them. I tell you everything has changed here with this "small farmer" project. And shall I tell you what we think? I am the oldest mother of this village and I say that it is good. We all do. Why should a woman spend her life hiding in the house?"

Sara Cameron is a writer living in Nepal who specializes in development issues. Manjula Giri is a Nepalese journalist who is currently the editor of "Shakti", a vernacular quarterly magazine fo women.

The "small farmer" project Sita Devi speaks so approvingly of provides credit to poor farmers without the prohibitive collateral requirements normally associated with loan schemes. It also offers farmers a repayment schedule commensurate with their ability to pay. And, it has served as a basis for community breakthroughs in other areas, including the traditionally restricted role of women.

The conception of Nepal's "Small Farmer Development Programme" (SFDP) dates back to 1973 when FAO and UNDP initiated a regional project called the Asian Survey of Agrarian Reform and Rural Development. It revealed that small and marginal farmers had largely been missed by the pre-dominating "top-down" approach to development. The rural poor, reported the survey, could not be expected to take advantage of benefits which they were not organized to receive.

The survey advised policy changes which would positively discriminate in favour of the peasant sector. One such suggestion was the

The "small farmer" project has encouraged community breakthroughs in other areas, including the traditionally restricted role of women. UNICEF 761/Larson

active promotion of development services at the local-level, to self-help groups which could be built up among the small farmers. Nepal was the first country to implement a project along these lines.

When the FAO-funded schemes for SFDP began in the mid-seventies, it had already been established that the dependency of the Nepalese poor on loans from moneylenders (which attract astronomical interest rates of up to 60 per cent) constituted one of their major problems. With farms sufficient to meet their needs for only six to eight months of the year, most farmers were forced to become low-paid day-labourers or to borrow money just to meet their food needs.

As the national agency responsible for the "small farmer" programme, the Agricultural Development Bank of Nepal (ADB/N) began easing this problem by making its credit facilities more readily available for low-cost production credit schemes. In essence, the ADB/N began supplying small farmers with services it has always made available to much wealthier farmers.

One important difference was that "small farmer credit" was credit-without-red-tape. More significant was the policy that "small farmers" do not have to own land or put up their property or goods as collateral against the loans they take out. Instead they form groups of between eight and twenty members who borrow on a group-guarantee basis.

"Small farmers" as defined by the programme are not supposed to own more than one hectare of land, or should not have a yearly income exceeding Rs. 950, (US$55). Occasionally, rather wealthier farmers or their wives have been admitted to "small-farmer" groups. With as many as 62 per cent of rural families in Nepal qualifying for "small farmer" status, it is important for the programme's benefits to be restricted to those for whom they are intended. However, according to at least one official of the ADB/N, the inclusion of "middle-sized" farmers has not always been detrimental to the project.

"When we started the SFDP, and when we go into new sites today, it is necessary sometimes to involve these "middle-sized" farmers. The poorest farmers are very reluctant to borrow money from such a large institution as the Agricultural Development Bank. We have to demonstrate to them what we are trying to do. The "middle-sized" farmers are not so frightened of the bank, so we ask them to join a group. Then we encourage the smaller farmers to come and see what we are doing. After a while they become less shy of the bank, and more willing to join in."

Being a member of an organized group has improved the self-confidence of many women. Photo: Felsenthal.

Women were initially skeptical, but successes have eased doubts

When UNICEF and UNFPA became involved in SFDP in the early eighties the programme expanded its efforts to involve women. The two agencies began by training and funding the salaries of the Women Group Organizers (WGOs) who now work alongside their male counterparts in (GOs) 27 of the present 121 "small farmer" sites.

Persuading Nepal's poorest women to form active self-help groups and take out loans was not always easy for the newly established WGOs. When Bhisma Ojha came to work with women in Budhanilkantha three and a half years ago she began by conducting a house-to-house survey to assess their needs. But when she started talking about money the women were not interested.

One of them, Sri Laxmi, is a middle-aged mother of five children who lives on a small farm overlooking the Budhanilkantha settlement. "When Bhisma Ojha asked us to borrow money we said that this was a business for the men," she recalls. "They are the people with time to go to the bank. Women have too much work to do. We do not know about writing or filling in the bank's forms.

"But Bhisma-ji kept on coming up here.

She brought the forms with her. She wrote on them for us. She told us we could use the bank's money to buy chickens and goats, and said that her money was much cheaper than that of the village moneylenders. She did all this for us, so in the end we agreed."

Sri Laxmi's group of eight women emerged naturally from the small community she lived in. For years they'd worked side-by-side in each other's paddy fields, sowing and reaping the rice harvest. They'd gathered woodfuel together, collected water together, and seen their children grow up together. They listened to Bhisma Ojha's list of projects that the bank was willing to finance, and decided under her guidance to take out a loan amounting to US$200. This they used, individually and collectively, to raise goats and chickens, to buy beehives and fertilizer, and to purchase materials used to make paper file folders which they subsequently sold to the local ADB/N office.

The interest rates they paid – the same as those paid by wealthier farmers – varied between 10 per cent to 15 per cent depending on how they used their loans, but within two years the debt was cleared. Today the goats and chickens bought by Sri Laxmi's group continued to supply them with income, part of which goes into a group savings account in the ADB/N which Bhisma Ojha set up for them.

One reason for the success of SFDP in promoting loans to the poor and attracting repayment rates which compete very favourably with those paid by richer farmers is its flexibility. Repayment schedules are closely tied to those periods when income is being generated.

Loans for the purchase of buffalos – the principal work animal in Nepal – are only due for repayment while the buffalo is in milk. When the buffalo goes dry the instalments are expected to cease. Repayments of seed and fertilizer loans are only due at harvest time, while loans used to finance orchards only begin to be repaid five years down the line, when the trees have begun to bear fruit.

Success of the repayment scheme is evident in the case of Usha Satyal, a shy woman in her mid-thirties. She was married at sixteen, widowed at seventeen, and ever since has lived in her brother's house in the village of Khopasi, about two hours' drive from Kathmandu.

For years she had laboured on her brother's land, then a neighbour persuaded her to join a local women's "small farmer" group. Usha was interested in learning how to use a knitting machine. UNFPA provided funds for training in Kathmandu, and Usha subsequently took out a loan for about US$360 to buy a machine. Within two years she had exceeded her repayment schedule by handing back a third of the capital loan to the ADB/N. After repaying this, and the regular running-cost loans she takes out every quarter, Usha is left with a surplus of about US$30 per month. Of this, half goes to her brother's household where it helps to feed his seven children. With the remainder she is beginning to buy some land of her own.

Community involvement provides individuals with support they will need when difficulties arise

The main funding agency for SFDP is the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), but FAO, UNFPA, USAID, British Aid and CARE, as well as UNICEF, have all begun to promote various development benefits through the ADB/Ns organizers. The agencies provide a vital social service complement to the economic activities of the ADB/N. The economic success of "small farmer" projects frequently generates a demand for other improvements which the agencies can help to fulfill. Efforts to improve child nutrition, for example, are enhanced by the availability of agricultural loans through SFDP as well as by the generated cash itself.

UNICEF is trying to promote a wide range of services for children through all the "small farmer" sites. For instance, the WGOs all receive training in child care, nutrition, immunization, oral rehydration therapy, family planning, and sanitation, which they are encouraged to bring up for discussion with the women's groups. UNICEF also gives priority to requests from "small farmer" sites for drinking water supply systems, schools and appropriate technology assistance. Such projects often require a level of community participation for which the "small farmer" groups are well-suited. With UNICEF assistance, SFDP has also become a vehicle for identifying and training community health leaders, for distributing vegetable seeds and training farmers, and for establishing rural Child Care Centres and conducting immunization campaigns.

But what happens when a project fails? What happens when a widow with five children and no land takes out a loan to raise goats, and the goats die? In the initial plan for SFDP it was intended for most "small farmer" groups to evolve into co-operatives which would generally take out loans on a collective basis. In practice, perhaps 90 per cent of loans are destined for individual, entrepreneurial activities. As a result, the "group-guarantee" on which loans are supposed to be taken out has tended to collapse. Group members will not often accept financial responsibility for the death of another's goats, for example, whether this has been caused by accident or neglect.

There is a great deal of individual flexibility regarding how loan-defaulters are handled. Although it is not officially permitted, some GOs provide support-loans to defaulters, to allow them to recover and pay off both debts. Sometimes a debt will be temporarily suspended to allow the defaulter time to recover. Pressure might be brought to bear on the group to persuade a defaulter who is genuinely capable of settling his debt to do so; as a last resort he may be expelled from the group and not permitted to take out any further loans from the ADB/N. It appears, however, that group members are hardly ever required to meet the debts of others.

Although this means that the ADB/N has virtually no insurance on its loans, total default is relatively infrequent, and because of the nature of the programme, only tends to involve small amounts of money.

Ganga Devi Dhungana has been a member of a "small farmer" group in the village of Tokla for several years. She swiftly repaid her initial loan of US$500 out of profits from the weaving business she established. Her group willingly sanctioned a further loan of US$1,500 which she needed to expand the business. The local GO and WGO had also been impressed by the quality of goods produced in Ganga's workshop. They sold well on the local market.

The loan was processed, Ganga brought in a trainer to help improve her production, and invested in more equipment. Disaster struck when her husband died suddenly and a fierce gale blew the roof off her workshop. Production ground to a halt, and so did Ganga Dhungana's repayments to the bank.

A meeting was called for all the Tokla group members who had "guaranteed" the loan. After discussing the tragedies with the SFDP officials they agreed to work together to help her. The members of the Tokla group offered their labour free to help repair the damaged workshop, while the ADB/N organized a new repayment plan involving a temporary suspension of the loan, while Ganga Dhungana got back on her feet.

Despite their problems, women organizers are a key to the programme's success

One of the most significant benefits of the programme is the way in which it is helping the "small farmers" to change their image of themselves. Being a member of an organized group improves self-confidence among many women. It raises their awareness of themselves and their capabilities, and brings them into touch with the "outside" world. It gives the poor farmers a voice in their communities which they previously lacked. Some of the small farmers admit that they used to be like "frightened mice; always running away from the big cats of the village". Now, they say, they are no longer afraid.

In view of their varied but critical responsibilities, the GOs and the WGOs need to be highly committed and well-trained. In fact, it is not difficult to find many impressive GOs and WGOs working for the "small farmer" scheme, but expansion of the programme has been very rapid and this has put a strain on the recruitment and training of new organizers. Forty new "small farmer" sites have emerged in the last two or three years alone. Some are staffed by a single organizer who is expected to provide SFDP services across a vast area which lacks roads, telephones, and the most basic services.

Because the programme is potentially capable of bringing such benefits to depressed rural areas there is a growing amount of political pressure to push expansion even further. There is little doubt in the minds of those closest to SFDP that this would be a mistake. The programme may already be over-stretched and needs to be consolidated at the existing sites before moving on to any more.

The effectiveness of the WGOs, in particular, is undermined by their lack of job security. They are currently employed on one-year contracts in positions which are always very junior to their male counterparts. Some of the GOs seem to feel that special womens' organizers are unnecessary. They point to the few women who joined the "small farmer" scheme before the WGOs were assigned.

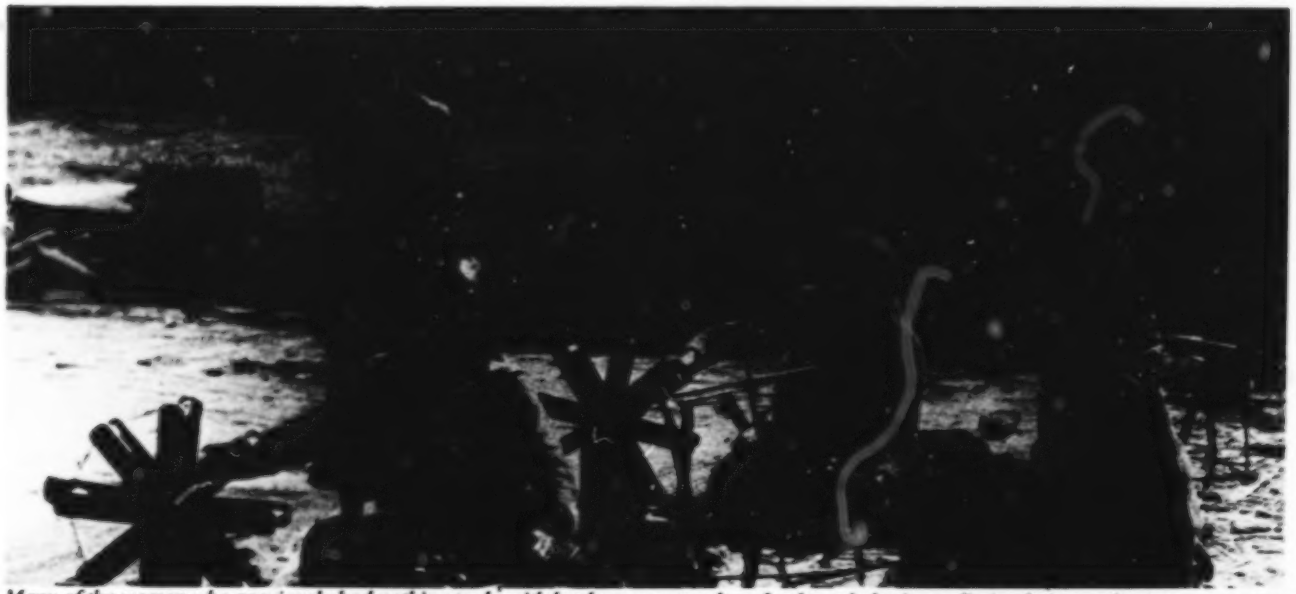
It is clear, however, that many more women join "small farmer" groups in those areas where the WGOs are operating. They are much more effective communicators with poor rural women, many of whom are entrenched in very conservative societies in which it is rare for a woman to talk with a man who is not her husband.

A major strength of the SFDP is its operation through an established banking institution like the ADB/N. The repayment record of the "small farmers" is setting a good example for other commercial banks, two of which have become involved with lending schemes which favour the poor. The female "small farmers" in particular have shown themselves to be a much better financial risk than their male partners, with repayment rates which are consistently higher. For the first time in Nepal, women are beginning to be seen as legitimate and responsible borrowers.

It is still too soon to judge how far SFDP is changing the very low status of women in Nepal, but most husbands of female "small farmers" seem pleased about the scheme. Bhisma Ojha says, "the women in Budhanilkantha say that the bank has changed their lives. They did not believe that they could set up these small businesses. Some of the women are surprised even by their ability to walk into the bank. They had no idea about money. Some of them hardly ever touched it. That is why they say this project is opening their eyes; and the news is travelling."

"When I came here less than four years ago I could not find a single woman who wanted to join a "small farmer" group. Today there are eleven groups in Budhanilkantha with over a hundred members. These days the women are beginning to come to me."

The young woman who sang that song at dusk in the village of Kakarbhitta displayed a knowledge of the world which was completely unknown to her mother. Through the "small farmer" programme a few of Nepal's poorest rural women (possibly no more than 3,000 at present) are beginning to see the world in a new way. They are attaining a level of economic experience which was previously unknown to them. Some are beginning to find that economic freedom can lead the way to many other freedoms. □



Many of the women who previously had nothing to do with banks now enter them freely and obtain credit for their own businesses. UNICEF 063/Sprague

"The iron rice bowl has been cracked"

Close to one quarter of the world's population lives in China – approximately half of which are women. KIM LEM recently visited the country and talked with several of them about how their lives are changing for the better – and about what future changes are needed.

Women, according to Confucius, were little more than lowly creatures whose purpose in life was to do housework and procreate. It was not until the early 20th century that such feudal ideas were dispelled, and not until the latter part of the century that the roles of Chinese women changed profoundly.

In recent years women have made the transition from wives and mothers to participants with increasing opportunities in society. Before 1949, there were 610,000 women in the Chinese workforce – or 7.5 per cent of the total. Today, as China embarks on its modernization course, the figure has increased to 41.99 million or – 36.9 per cent.

Since economic reforms were instituted several years ago as part of the country's modernization drive, individual economy has been encouraged as a necessary supplement to the state planned economy. In a centralized socio-economic system wher lethargy had set in, the reforms have un leashed Chinese initiative, fueled by pros pects for wealth and success through hard work. And with increased productivity, the changes among women have been particularly marked.

Li Xiao Yu is a young, articulate sales manager at the souvenir shop of the Xian Hotel that accommodates mostly foreigners in Xian city. Forty per cent of the hotel staff are women. Before this, she was a member of the Chinese army (where traditionally the benefits are good), working in the culture section that puts on entertainment programmes. "I was looking for an opportunity to grow, to expand my horizons. I wanted to work in an area that dealt with foreigners and learn from them," says Li, 32, who had requested re-assignment and was placed at the hotel three years ago.

"I want to continue to grow in my job and open my own business someday," says 32-year-old Li Xiao Yu. UNICEF 1082/Lem

Although she knew nothing about business at first, Li sensed that the country's more open attitude had provided a chance for the new career she sought. With some training, initiative and hard work, Li has moved up the ranks. Now she is in charge of orders and sales, including foreign business. She receives a monthly salary of 140 yuan (US$56) plus bonus, compared to her old salary of 50 yuan.

"If the country prospers, the people will too," says Li, who with her husband, a doctor, recently bought a Japanese colour TV and hopes soon to purchase a refrigerator. Not one given to frivolities in the past, Li likes to wear cosmetics occasionally and adds a dash to her clothing by donning a floral-print scarf.

"I want to continue to grow in my job, get more experience and own my own business someday," she says. Enlisting her retired mother-in-law to look after her eight-year-old son during the week, Li says she can concentrate on her work and build a better future for her family.

Zhang Yuhua, a Beijing University graduate, is a 31-year-old biochemist at a research institute in the capital. Because of the limited number of universities and stiff entrance requirements, Zhang is one of only four per cent of the country's total university graduates.

Talking in the modest one-room dwelling of a three-story apartment building where she lives with her husband, a computer specialist, Zhang admits she has been very lucky. But the price she has paid is high. After years of intensive studies to get where she is, Zhang has decided that her career takes priority. She and her husband do not plan a family, an idea that displeases her in-laws but which is becoming more acceptable these days among career-oriented couples. Though the future appears bright, Zhang believes discimination against women exists.

"In college entrance examinations, women have to have a higher score than men in certain areas and in work assignments units still prefer men," Zhang contends. "They also don't like it when a woman takes time out for her maternity leave because their schedules may be disrupted."

Zhang does not expect to earn much more than 100 yuan per month (her current salary is 60 yuan) but, she says, "I will have a position in life and earn the respect of others."

Kim Lem is a former editor of Women in China magazine who recently returned from China.

It is in rural areas, though, that change has been most dramatic

Perhaps the most startling changes affecting women have been in the countryside. With a total population in China of one billion, rural women comprise approximately one-half of the country's 800 million peasants.

For years, they divided their time between home and the fields where, according to work points, their wages were much less than men's. In 1979, the responsibility system permitted peasants to contract individual plots of land from the government. The new policy, which took the family as the basic unit, encouraged peasants to produce as much as they could. After meeting the state quota, surplus could be sold on the free market, traded, or kept for the peasants' own use.

The experiment proved also to have broad ramifications for women who turned to such sideline occupations as chicken raising, rabbit breeding, or handicraft work that found good markets. Some women took this opportunity to leave the fields altogether for factories (regarded as a step up) and other work traditionally done by urban women or by men. All told, rural women have become an economic force to be reckoned with and a significant number are pulling in a major portion of their family's income.

In Lung Hau Township (the word commune is no longer used), a farming area in southern Shanghai, Jin Rei Feng, 51, works in a garment factory. The mother of three grown daughters, all in their 20's, Jin used to work in the fields. "Before 1979, everyone had an iron rice bowl," says Jin, referring to a system that paid the same no matter how much or how little work was done. "Now, it's ability that counts."

She earns about 100 yuan a month, plus bonus, a salary that would have been inconceivable a few years ago. When asked if having three daughters has posed hardships on a farming family, she smiles and says, "things have changed. Now a son-in-law can come to live in the wife's family."

Changes have also affected the life of 35-year-old Lui Shuguei, a peasant woman who lives in Sihezhuang, Changping County, a rural district outside Beijing. Ten years ago, as a young bride, she had settled here with her husband and his parents.

"I had to take care of my in-laws and do everything myself. We were so poor we didn't even have furniture," Lui recalls.

After the reforms began, Lui's junior middle school education helped her get a job keeping the books for the village. At home, she raised chickens to bring in extra income. Her comfortable new lifestyle is reflected in her confident manner, neat appearance, and several modern conveniences in the three-room house she shares with her husband and two children, ages 10 and nine.

WOMEN EMPLOYEES FROM 1949–1983

Year	Total	%
1949	[illegible]	7.5%
1979	[illegible]	32.9%
1983	[illegible]	36.9%

Between 1949 and 1983 increased by [illegible] times

PERCENTAGE OF WOMEN EMPLOYEES IN STATE ENTERPRISES

Industry	33%
Agriculture, Forestry, Water Conservation, Meteorology	34.9%
Commerce, Catering and Service Trades, Supply and Marketing	37.3%
Urban Public Utilities	37.2%
Scientific Research	34.3%
Culture, Education, Public Health	38.2%
Finance, Insurance	35.1%
Transport, Post and Telecommunications	19.8%
Building, Geology	22.3%
Government Offices, People's Organizations	16.3%

Source: Statistical Bureau of China

Despite changes, there is still a long way to go

While rural and urban women clearly have made breakthroughs, particularly in recent years, many obstacles still confront Chinese women.

Some note that women have few opportunities in obtaining education, and work assignments, especially in professional or management positions. Centuries-old feudal concepts die hard, these women say, and many men still regard women as inferior. In units, leaders are often men who prefer hiring men and giving them priority when it comes to pay raises and promotions. What is more, feudal thinking affects not only men but certain women who, raised to be quiet and submissive, don't have confidence in themselves or their abilities.

A survey conducted by the All-China Federation of Trade Unions found that many women workers have less than a primary school education. Women were also found to constitute as much as 70 per cent of the country's 200 million illiterates and semi-illiterates. With the scarcity of universities and limited training progammes available, few women have chances for real advancement. Only some 250,000 students are admitted to universities each year and of these, less than one-third are women.

A majority of Chinese women complain that a good part of their time after work hours are spent doing household chores. In dense urban areas where most couples work six days a week, the lack of adequate child-care facilities and recreation centres for youngsters poses serious problems.

As the country modernizes, the words 'higher productivity' have become common and highly symbolic. "The iron rice bowl has been cracked," many Chinese now say, and those who are unable to meet the new standards fear their salaries will be reduced or, in some cases, that they will be fired if they fail to meet the quota. Many of these are women.

With government emphasis on one child per family, cases of female infanticide and forced abortions have come to the attention of the United Nations. In the remote countryside, where the economy is backward and modern ideas come slowly, survival means more hand labour – for which boys are still preferred. Stories of wife battering, rape, parental interference in marriage, and the exacting of huge sums of money and gifts in the form of dowries have also been mentioned in the Chinese press.

In an effort to protect and educate women about their rights, a massive campaign was launched early last year in Beijing. Publicity booths and counselors dispensed advice to women on the marriage law, penal code and labour regulations. Many of the issues most critical to Chinese women will be on the agenda at the Nairobi Conference for the UN Decade for Women in July. The All-China Women's Federation has held preparatory meetings in which various departments presented data on achievements and obstacles to women's advancement.

Priorities for action include the improvement of women's educational levels and professional skills, their promotion to decision-making levels, an increased availability of child-care facilities and domestic help services, the elimination of illiteracy, publicity of laws granting equal rights and the improvement of rural health conditions.□

Tradition against the law

In many societies laws have been made by and for men. Often they deny women rights as full citizens by either omitting, specifically limiting, or subordinating women's rights to those of men. Zimbabwe is one country where talk of changing the status of women under the new constitution has raised difficult questions – and led people to realize that changing the law is only part of the process. By SIGRUN SLAPGARD.

She had no time for weeping. After the burial of her husband, the trucks came and emptied her house.

A widow with four children in Harare, she is caught between the pressures of modern town life and the continued practices of African Customary Law.

Nothing illegal has happened. The husband has not left any will, and due to customary laws his brother has full right to take back the belongings that traditionally follow the husband's family.

Normally the brother would also be charged with the care and custody of the minor children. The wife goes with the estate, seeking maintenance within the extended family.

In earlier times, when the society was purely agrarian, this may have been a sound, practical, and universally acceptable solution to the problems of widows. But now, with the financial pressures of modern urban society, the brother has no possibility of extending his family. He puts into practice just half of the customary law tradition: he takes back all the belongings of the late brother and leaves the widow with her four children and an empty house.

This is one painful example of what happens when new social realities clash with old traditions. In Zimbabwe, the women now have a far stronger legal position than before Independence, but it takes time to adapt new laws to traditional ways. It is a problem of adapting what are primarily rural values to an urban society.

Sigrun Slapgard is an Information Officer in UNICEF's Harare Office.

For rural women it is also a question of how to start using their new rights. Chiedza, a rural woman, is working the soil with her hoe, as do the majority of Zimbabwean women. This year she had a record harvest of cotton. But when the cheque finally came, it was addressed to her husband. Chiedza never saw any of the earnings and had to ask her husband for household money as before.

Does she know though, that the Age of Majority Act passed in 1982 gives her the right to open a bank account in her own name? Yes, she knows, but no woman in her area has an account of her own. And why should she upset the husband and break tradition?

The new law brings necessary change, but is meeting resistance from both men and women.

To use her new rights would be controversial for Chiedza. The new law seems to be shaking the very foundations of traditional practice in Zimbabwe. While customary law regards women as perpetual minors, the Age of Majority Act has given women over 18 years of age certain legal rights they never had before. Zimbabwean women can now enter into contracts on their own behalf and have legal custody and guardianship for their children. They can choose whether they will stick to the traditional *roora* (bride-price) system or marry on their own accord.

The Act is causing continued and heated debate in many sectors of society. Many argue that it puts women in an insecure situation, and that it creates more confusion than clarity about women's rights. Even some younger, well-educated women believe the Act is backfiring on cultural traditions.

Critics see the Age of Majority Act as a sign that things are moving too fast and as a Western law which goes against the traditional way of life. The fear is that it will destroy family institutions and create chaos and anarchy if women can make whatever decision on marriage they wish, and sue for damages in court in their own right.

Many wish to preserve the good gesture which is the origin of the *roora*-system: a token gift of thanks to the parents. Some feel *roora* protects the girl against being taken advantage of by men. Others feel that the parents who have sacrificed to feed and educate their daughters should be entitled to some form of reward – or payment of damages if their daughters are "spoiled." With urbanization, however, there is a growing problem. Parents often capitalize on their daughters, demanding exorbitant payment from a prospective husband's family in exchange for their permission for her to marry.

One of the resolutions passed at the ZANU (PF) Women's League Congress earlier this year urges the government to stop the commercialization of *roora* through an educational campaign. As so often happens, the original meaning of traditions has been distorted in the process of adjusting to new social norms.

Men's attitudes – and time – are ultimately more important to a change in women's rights than the laws are

The period of transition which Zimbabwe is presently experiencing is having a profound impact on women, but men are also

an integral part of the process. As Ruth Weiss, a consultant of the Zimbabwean Mass Media Trust and author of the book "The Women of Zimbabwe" says: "It is not the laws that make the real difference for the women, but the way men change." In daily life it is more important for women to get some help in the kitchen or in the fields than for the laws to change.

What does a Zimbabwean worker in Harare think about his position towards his wife? Stone Vintura lives in one of the suburbs outside Harare and has no doubt: "I decide for her." He has two daughters and three sons.

There is no doubt that he wants the *roora* for his daughters: "We all pay *roora*; I did it and my father did it. We cannot change what the old people decided just like that. We have to follow the traditional rules."

He is aware of the new law, but does not think it is time for it yet. Even though he thinks his daughters should help with the cooking and the sons should play football, he wants the girls to receive an education. "I think I might help my wife with the housework in the future and that life will be different for my children, but we need time," Stone Vintura says.

In a different way, others also believe the real change will come with time, not just with the passage of a new law. "The real change will come with the coming generation" says Deputy Minister Dr. Naomi Nhiwatiwa of Information, Post and Telecommunications, "with the girls now attending schools as equals to boys, getting training in technical skills, and becoming engineers and not just nurses and teachers."

Now even though the women are in the majorty in the rural areas, only a small handful of the 1,204 councillors are women. Progress has come on other fronts though. "In spite of the general setbacks by almost four years of drought," Dr. Nhiwatiwa continues, "as a whole we have made major achievements. First of all, with Independence we won back our personal identities. We now have adult literacy campaigns where the majority are women; we got free primary education and primary health care; midwife skills were upgraded; labour-laws were introduced to secure women their pension-rights, maternity-leave, and opportunity to breastfeed; and out of the 3,000 co-operatives in this country the majority belongs to women. Women get organized into savings clubs and community devoted activities in the rural areas.

"Prime Minister Mugabe calls 1985 the year of consolidation," she says. "The *Shona* word for consolidation is even stronger. It means to fasten the roots. As for the situation of women I think the background has been laid beautifully – we have met some resistance and taken some steps backwards to find out where we came from, but now it is time to fasten our roots." □

For rural women it is a question of how to start using their new rights. **UN Photo: 153614/Truscott**

Sudan

The *real* village health workers

In many of the poorest parts of the world, childbirth is something women have learned to cope with on their own or with help, when available, from traditional birth attendants (TBAs). With the right supplement of training and equipment, the role of the TBA can be improved – thus helping to reduce high rates of maternal and child mortality and birth related diseases. By WENDY WALLACE.

Fatma Mahmoud is a village midwife in rural Sudan. Like her clients, she is poor. She lives in a small hut made of mud and grass. At night, it is lit by a parafin lamp. She cooks on a charcoal stove, and buys water from a donkey cart. She has four children and her husband is a farmer.

Fatma trained for two years at a government midwifery school. Her license to practise midwifery is framed and hung on the wall next to some family photographs. The midwifery kit she received on graduation is kept locked in a glass doored cupboard, together with some teacups, glasses, and other prized possessions.

She is one of five thousand qualified village midwives (VMs) in Sudan. The local government clinic pays her about $14 per month for her work. She gives ante and post natal care and advice, and is always on call for deliveries. People often come for her in the early hours, she says, and she goes on foot to their houses, taking her kit with her.

On arrival, she tells the family to boil water and if it is dark to borrow extra torches from the neighbours. Under ideal conditions she uses one bed in the room for the mother to lie on and another as a table.

"Delivery is difficult," she says. "The husband should not be present, and I don't need more than one woman to help me." She gives the woman sweet tea during her labour, and washes her with the boiled water. She scrubs her own hands.

Most Sudanese women are circumcised, and their labia sewn together. Immediately before delivery, Fatma makes a cut with a pair of sterilized scissors, to allow the baby's head to come out. After delivery she cuts the umbilical cord with a sterile blade and dresses the wound with gauze. She waits for the placenta to appear naturally. If it appears as if some parts of it have been left behind in the womb, she refers the case to a doctor.

Wendy Wallace is a freelance writer who recently worked for UNICEF in Sudan.

Government trained midwives are in the minority, leaving most births to traditional birth attendants

Without mentioning their names, Fatma condemns the untrained midwives who also operate in her village. She says they are dangerous to mothers. But training midwives is a lengthy and costly process. Each one costs the government about Sud 2000 (US$670), and finding suitable candidates is difficult – few village women are free to leave their husbands and children and go away to a college in town.

Eighty per cent of all rural births are attended by women known to the medical profession as 'traditional birth attendants' (TBAs). Among the people they are known as 'midwives of the rope', because they normally help deliver children for women who give birth in a squatting position, supporting themselves by holding on to a rope attached to the roof of the hut.

Their lack of equipment is a danger. The women's labia is cut at the last moment to prevent excessive loss of blood during labour. The TBA uses a razor blade, not scissors, and as a result the baby can sustain a head wound which may be fatal.

To cut the umbilical cord, the TBA uses a kitchen knife, a sharp stone, or even a blade of tough grass, depending on what is available in her area. Neonatal tetanus killed one in every hundred babies born alive, according to a recent study made in Southern Sudan. (In the whole of England and Wales, in 1979, there were only five deaths from tetanus). The disease can be transmitted by a dirty cutting instrument, or by the local dressing of ash and oil which TBAs put on the wound, or by the fine, string-like roots used for tying the cord.

Practices vary regarding the afterbirth. Some TBAs gently squeeze the top of the womb to help expel it. Others advise the mother to blow into a bottle, which contracts her diaphram and puts abdominal pressure on the placenta, which helps to force it out. One described how she ties the cord to the mother's toes and gets her to move her feet gently to pull out the placenta.

After the delivery, families pay the TBA three Sudanese pounds for a girl but five for a boy or make her a present of soap or cooking oil. "We do it simply," said a seasoned TBA. "We deliver, we wash the mother and baby, we make our joy cries and we go home to our house."

This is an understatement of the skills of the TBA. But as Fatma complained, ignorance is dangerous. Even some TBAs think so. "The trained one is better. But the women still call me," remarked Salwa, one TBA in Eastern Sudan. "They prefer a women they know."

'Midwives of the rope' are often following in the footsteps of their mothers and grandmothers. Their work is respected because newborns are such an important feature of Sudanese life. It is mainly through bearing and rearing children that a woman in Sudan gains status and respect in her community. Large families are almost mandatory, partly as an insurance against the high mortality rate. TBAs and the women who seek their services put their trust in God to ensure a safe delivery – and usually accept a still birth or the death of the mother as God's will.

Training enhances the TBA's value to a society much in need of her services

TBAs are a considerable resource for a poor country struggling to upgrade its health services. They are experienced, trusted, and paid for by the women themselves. Through basic training and with some simple equipment the vital service they offer can be improved. UNICEF and the Ministry of Health (MOH) have initiated a training course specially designed for TBAs in a pilot area in Western Sudan.

Forty women from rural and nomadic backgrounds attended the first course in 1982, in a specially built training compound in El Kweik, Southern Kordofan. Thirty six of them attended a training course a year later. A UNICEF/MOH mission evaluated the successes and failures of this first training effort at the end of 1983, and revised the course accordingly. A second group has recently graduated from the shorter, modified course.

Hygiene is a major emphasis of the course. Trainers use a model of a picquant woman's anatomy, including foetus and umbilical cord, to teach safe delivery procedures. "Most of the women are illiterate," says Sadia Idris, UNICEF's Assistant Programme Officer for Health. "There is no way to explain it on the blackboard so they have to do it themselves." Several days are spent on the model, going through each step from sterilizing the instruments to cutting the cord.

Other topics include ante- and post-natal care, nutrition, breastfeeding and treatment of diarrhoea. Diarrhoea is the biggest single killer of children in Sudan. TBAs are taught to prepare their own rehydration mixture with sugar and salt. The value of traditional remedies using fruits and seeds is also upheld. Given the chronic drug shortages, "they have to save the child with the things they have," says Sadia. On graduation, the women are supplied with a basic midwifery kit.

Discussions take place on female circumcision, and the dangers to female health are explained. Other harmful traditions and practices are also explored. Sadia Idris stresses that "our ladies are very conservative. It is not that easy to change the behaviour of someone who has been practising for ten years."

Nonetheless, the results have been encouraging. One village council declared to the evaluation mission that in the 19 months since their TBA had been trained, they had not buried one child. Other councils remarked on a definite decline in child deaths.

One difficulty the mission discovered was that the TBAs were spending so much more time with mothers and children that they were no longer able to make their usual living from the land or their animals. Villages are proposing to pay TBAs either with money or assistance with their farming.

Another course was scheduled in January 1985. A major expansion of the TBA training programme is planned over the next few years. It only costs Sud 150.00 (US$50) to train a TBA. Trusted and relied on by mothers, if anyone can promote grass roots preventative health care in the village in Sudan, it is her. □

For many Sudanese, healthy children depend in large part on the help they get at childbirth from traditional birth attendants. Photo: Wallace

Indonesia

Where mothers make a difference

Diarrhoeal diseases are the single biggest killers of children in the world today. Oral Rehydration Therapy (ORT) is a simple, often life saving remedy promoted by UNICEF and other agencies around the world. DIANA SMITH explains how mothers in Indonesia's slums are trained to use ORT and chart their children's growth.

In some ways, the mothers in Sawahan have a head-start.

Parts of the area where they live, located in Surabsya, Indonesia's second largest city, have recently been assisted by a World Bank programme. They are also not as poor as the city squatters, thousands of whom live in tiny shacks packed along the side of the over-used river.

These mothers, with the help of UNICEF-trained worker, Mrs. Abdul Rachman, have made noticeable progress. Few of their children are malnourished and when diarrhoea does come, the mothers know how to stop it from causing serious trouble.

Reports show that slum children in Indonesia get diarrhoea up to 10 times as often as older members of the family – and all too often they die of it. One in every two deaths in Indonesia is that of a child, and half the childhood deaths follow a bout of diarrhoea. Half the deaths in children under five years are either caused by or associated with diarrhoea.

There are no medical statistics to prove to the expert that the scheme in Sawahan is working, but there is strong practical evidence. Mrs. Rachman has recently been visited by Mrs. Kartiman, the caretaker's wife of a neighbouring Rukin Tetangga (community of about 75 households) where women want to copy her programme.

Mrs. Kartiman, who is also a member of Indonesia's national women's organization, has told Mrs. Rachman that her programme has inspired them. "Now that we can see the results of this programme", Mrs. Kartiman says "we know it will be worthwhile for us to copy it."

Mrs. Kartiman meets with Mrs. Rachman and Mrs. Djoke, the nutrition worker, at her home to learn the basics of the programme, and later Mrs. Rachman will arrange for some of the women to take the UNICEF training course at a local health centre.

Preventing dehydration is probably the first and most important thing the mothers learn. Oral rehydration therapy (ORT) is simple to teach and has dramatic effects on childhood death rates.

City children are particularly vulnerable to diarrhoea. Whereas small babies are often breastfed and carried around by their mothers, small children must learn to fend for themselves. Between the ages of 12 and 18 months they get diarrhoea more often than at any other time in their life. They drink the local water and eat from take-away stalls like their parents, but they have much less resistance to infection. They also have less of a sense of toilet hygiene – and spend much time playing amongst dirt and rubbish.

It is the diseases caused by diarrhoea, not the diarrhoea itself, that are often the problem

But it is not the diarrhoea in itself which is the real worry. Everybody gets diarrhoea from time to time and people accept it as part of normal living. Some Indonesian mothers even welcome it in a small child; they see it as a sign of intellectual attainment and not necessarily someting to worry about.

The anxiety begins, though, if a child begins "to wilt like a flower out of water" – as the dehydration which diarrhoea causes is described. It is dehydration which often leads to the child's death, and few mothers know how to stop what is often a rapid decline.

With ORT, mothers simply learn how to keep the child's fluid level maintained while it is lost through diarrhoea or sickness. By giving the child a solution of sugar and salt in boiled, but cooled water, the danger of serious illness is drastically reduced.

All the instructions for ORT are included on the child's growth chart, given to the mother of every child included in the programme.

Once babies are weaned they are at their most vulnerable to diarrhoeal diseases. In children under the age of two years, about 10 per cent of the diarrhoea episodes lead to dehydration and about one per cent of them are life-threatening. Without ORT, even if diarrhoea does not kill the child, it may reduce the child's nutritional status and leave it more open to further infection.

It is for this reason that weaning is often postponed. Mothers fear the child's vulnerability to infections, and avoid the process for as long as possible. But experts say that most children need supplementary foods from about six months onwards and if weaning does not take place until the child is one or even two-years-old, malnutrition in the form of stunted growth is certain.

Both paths, it seems, lead to diarrhoea. So what Mrs. Rachman has done is to introduce growth monitoring as the routine part of the programme for the mothers and children involved.

"When I started this programme", Mrs. Rachman said, "we looked for problem areas and then drew up a plan of action." A major problem, she said, was the level of malnutrition. "Out of the 500 children, 123 were malnourished to some degree at the start."

UNICEF provided her with enough growth charts and infant weighing scales so that the mothers could come along to a session one afternoon per month.

Growth charts and weighing scales will also be available to Mrs. Kartiman and her group free of charge from UNICEF. Mrs. Rachman has already helped 19 groups in the area get started, and says four of them have extended their activities into supplementary feeding for underfed children without financial assistance from UNICEF. She is particularly happy to help Mrs. Kartiman because it is the first programme which has been initiated by a group of women without any initial prodding from her.

Diana Smith is Assistant Editor of Far East Health Magazine.

Through the use of growth charts and weighing scales, mothers can make sure their child is healthy. ICEF 9301/Mangunwidjojo

Often the problem when trying to get growth monitoring programmes going is that Mrs. Rachman finds mothers know little, if anything, about malnutrition. Parents do not notice a lack of adequate growth because many other children of the same age are the same size. To them, their child is normal.

But once the mothers are involved, they can see where their child is on the growth chart compared to where it should be, and they can also see if the growth curve is flattening out over time, indicating that the child is ceasing to grow.

They know then that they should pay special attention to the child's diet if they want to provide maximum resistance to the nose and chest infections and diarrhoeal diseases that are all too prevalent in the poorer parts of the city.

ORT is effective, but not a guarantee

But however careful the mothers are there will still be infections and sickness among these children – and some will become serious. ORT will not prevent every child from becoming dehydrated. In serious cases medical attention will be vital to save the child's life.

Few mothers in these poor city areas will, however, take their child to see a doctor. Only 15 per cent of people in Indonesia are reached by health services, and though there are more doctors in urban areas, few are accessible to the lower echelons of society.

This is not ncessarily because it costs too much for them. The Indonesian government aims to provide poorer people with treatment free of charge. The fact is that many of these people live hand-to-mouth existences which preclude the time involved to seek medical help, let alone afford transport costs.

Children will continue to die of diarrhoea but the World Health Organization has estimated that the introduction of ORT can reduce the mortality rate by between 50 and 75 per cent.

Mrs. Rachman encourages people to become involved in clean water programmes. By approaching their caretaker and offering to contribute something towards the costs, he may be able to improve their local water supply – and reduce the cost per bucket!

One UNICEF-assisted programme in the area has meant that the local caretaker is now able to provide a bucket of clean water for only five rupiah when it can cost as much as 25 rupiah from other local sources. This can make a big difference to an average family budget of 500 rupiah a day.

She also encourages the local people to keep their houses and yards clean and tidy, and particularly to clean away excreta. Many families have now decided to take part in their own garbage collection systems, and some have helped clear spaces specifically for childrens' playgrounds. Sanitation and drainage is generally fairly good thanks to the World Bank programme.

But city life will always be tough for the smallest children. Even with risks of diarrhoea minimized, infections of the respiratory system are more prevalent in city children than village children. Mrs. Rachman says she also hopes to get people to plant trees in their tiny yards to help clean the air, but space is always limited.

The irony is that many village families move to the towns in the hope of benefitting their children with better schools and health facilities. Yet more and more of them are failing their children by the move.

At present, a quarter of the families in Jakarta are forced to live in slum and squatter settlements. Indonesia already has 21 cities with populations over 100,000 and the urban population is expected to double in less than 20 years. Soon half the city families will live in the slums – and without drastic intervention, even more small children will be dieing of diarrhoea. □

Laziness? Apathy? No...anaemia

Nearly 230 million women in the developing world are suffering daily from a needless cause – nutritional anaemia. This accounts for almost half of all reproductive aged women and two thirds of those who are pregnant or lactating. Yet anaemia can be prevented or alleviated. By SUE KASSIRER.

Anaemia debilitates. Yet it is hard to identify and may often be mistaken for laziness or apathy.

It manifests itself through dizziness, extreme lassitude, giddiness, tiredness, breathlessness, anorexia, soreness of the tongue and corners of the mouth, and abnormal sensitivity to extremes of temperatures. Severe anaemia has been shown to be directly related to both maternal and foetal mortality and morbidity. It can also cause severe mental depression, affect mental functioning, and aggravate already existing disorders.

Commonly thought to be a disease entity in itself, anaemia is actually a syndrome which results from severe malnutrition in its broadest sense – not a signal of impending malnutrition, but sadly, the end result.

Young children and women are the most susceptible to anaemia – particularly women of reproductive age and those who are pregnant or lactating. The social and economic implications are considerable, since in many countries women not only raise the children, but perform at least half of the society's manual labour.

Anaemia plagues women in the majority of the world's countries. In Bangkok, Thailand, the prevalence of anaemia in pregnant women doubled after the third pregnancy and increased five-fold after the fifth, according to a 1982 WHO report. In Algeria, three-fourths of all hospitalized women were found to be anaemic. In Western Africa, 24-99 per cent of pregnant women were found to be anaemic, while in South India the figure was between 60 and 80 per cent. In Papua New Guinea, between 50 and 100 per cent of women had hemoglobin concentrations below the norm.

In more developed countries, anaemia paradoxically comes about as a result of over-refinement of foods and a decrease in food intake due to an increasingly sedentary life-style. A study of several European countries has shown prevalence of anaemia in women to be in the range of only four to seven per cent.

Most anaemia can be linked to nutritional deficiency. The most prevalent type, and that from which most women suffer – especially in developing countries – is iron deficiency anaemia. In fewer cases, deficiencies in folate and vitamin B 12 also result in anaemia. The condition can also arise from non-dietary sources, such as excessive hemorrhaging, hereditary factors, and diseases such as hookworm and bacillary dysentary.

Pregnant women have an increased need for iron, but deficient diets often prevent them from getting it

Every second of every day, the body manufactures nearly ten million new red blood cells. Their primary function is to carry oxygen from the lungs to the rest of the body. These red blood cells contain a substance called haemoglobin, a vital protein which depends on iron for its composition. It is haemoglobin which gives the blood its bright red colour. When not enough haemoglobin is being manufactured anaemia results and the number of red blood cells falls significantly. Oxygen is not delivered sufficiently throughout the body.

Measurement of the body's haemoglobin level is the means by which anaemia is diagnosed. Without an adequate iron supply, the body cannot produce enough haemoglobin to keep it properly functioning. The healthy individual maintains body reserves of iron and is not dependent on daily iron intake. In the case of an iron-deficient diet, these body stores are quickly depleted and anaemia will result unless daily intake matches daily needs.

Young children need large amounts of iron for growth. Infants who subsist on breastmilk alone for too long a period often become anaemic because additional sources of iron are eventually needed. Women lose large quantities of iron through menstrual blood loss. Also, during pregnancy, the iron needs of the growing foetus take priority over those of the mother.

During the third trimester of pregnancy, a woman's iron requirement is increased six-fold, partly due to a substantial increase in red cell mass at this time. Women beyond menses and men are less frequently affected by anaemia, their bodies often having enough iron in reserve to meet their daily needs.

Iron comes from numerous sources and can be divided into two major categories – heme-iron (in meat, poultry and fish) and non-heme iron (of vegetable origin). While heme-iron is readily absorbed by the body, non-heme iron's availability to the body is dependent on the presence of other nutrients in the diet. It has been shown that foods rich in ascorbic acid enhance the absorption of non-heme iron.

Wheat, rice and maize all contain significant quantities of iron, yet if eaten on their own very little of this iron will be utilized by the body. The addition of an ascorbic-acid rich food such as broccoli, or a portion of meat, fish or poultry, will enhance the body's absorption of the grain's iron and thus help offset the possibility of anaemia.

Conversely, certain other foods such as wheat bran and tea inhibit the body's absorption of non-heme iron. The latter is of particular significance, given the common tradition of tea drinking in many parts of the world.

Given that both animal products and fruits and vegetables which contain ascorbic acid are among the least plentiful and most expensive in the world, it is not surprising that women in developing countries are vulnerable to anaemia. Even in developing countries where these foods do exist in

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abundance, they are frequently ignored as foodstuffs due to a lack in nutrition education. Add to this the fact that women often receive smaller portions than men of what food there is, and the frequency of pregnancy in developing countries, and one begins to see why such a critical situation exists.

More efforts to treat anaemia are needed

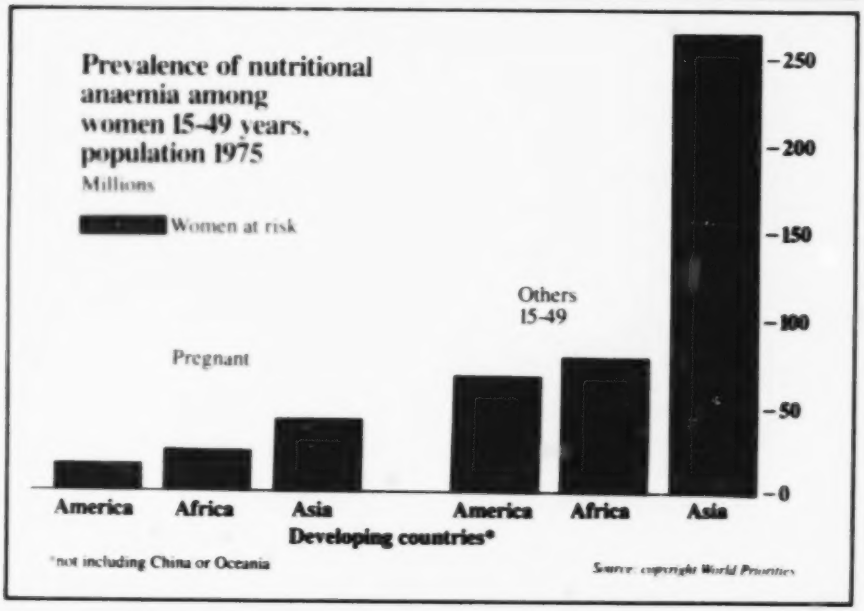
Ideally, iron deficiency should be controlled at the individual level, in the home. Through nutrition education, women can learn more about diets which provide sufficient iron. But in the absence of iron-carrying foods, the problem must be addressed by the public health sector. Vulnerable members of the population should be identified and given oral or injectable iron supplements. The entire population may be reached through the addition of iron to frequently consumed foodstuffs.

However, complications are inherent in either method of supplementation. Oral and injectable supplements often have unpleasant side-effects such as nausea, heartburn, diarrhoea or constipation. Providing iron-fortified food is also a complex matter, succeeding only if a suitable carrier substance is found – i.e., a dietary substance which is consumed by the entire population, distributed from only a few central points, and is not altered in shelf life, taste or appearance by the addition of iron.

In nearly any given population, there are individuals who, for hereditary reasons, retain too much iron, a condition which can be as serious as the absorption of too little iron. All of these factors must be taken into account when considering the best possible programme.

In Thailand, a fish sauce has been successfully fortified with iron-EDTA. However, due to dietary custom, its use has varied greatly from one region to another. In India, some success has also been achieved through iron fortification of salt, and experimental attempts have been made in Mauritius to enrich wheat flour. More of such programmes are widely needed.

Anaemia does not proclaim itself loudly, or with visibly startling signs. Mistakenly under-estimated, it has commonly been dismissed as just another "woman's problem." Yet its consequences are devastating, putting a debilitating strain on the energy, human fulfillment, and productivity of the world. □



It is during pregnancy that women are particularly susceptible to anaemia. ICEF 9007/Frank

Board paper outlines priorities for women's programmes

The link between UNICEF's women's programmes and its child survival and development strategy needs strengthening, according to a policy review paper prepared recently for the Executive Board.

The paper reviews UNICEF's actions in support of women since 1980, and underscores the importance of basing programmes on an appreciation of women's multiple roles and responsibilities. These go beyond the fundamental roles of nurturer and reproductive agent, to women's needs and responsibilities as economic providers, food producers, and community leaders. Focussing on women as individuals and as mothers, programmes have been oriented more toward development than welfare.

These points provide a basis for UNICEF's presentation to the global conference marking the end of the United Nations Decade for Women, which will be held in Nairobi, Kenya, between 15-26 July 1985. Representatives from governments, intergovernmental agencies, and non-governmental organizations will attend.

The relationship between GOBI measures designed to protect childrens' health and the mother's potentially conflicting needs requires further examination, the paper's authors stress. "Staying at home to breast-feed clearly benefits the infant, but the financial loss incurred when women leave their jobs usually makes the whole family suffer. On the other hand, if infant illness can be reduced through breast-feeding or other measures, the time loss to women can be reduced and all can gain."

A key to the successful application of child survival strategies to women's needs is the enhancement of the mother's ability to feed, care for, and raise children adequately. Programme design must take adequate measure of women's limited resources – of time, money, education, and access to health care – as well as their changing economic responsibilities, work patterns, and opportunities for food production.

Other priorities underlined by the paper include the need for more income-generating projects, the inclusion of more women in credit programmes and manpower training systems, expansion of women's educational opportunities, and community based health programmes. In some countries, UNICEF has attempted to influence the development of national, social and economic programmes that would benefit women.

The Board paper points out that while there have been changes in the way UNICEF has approached the issue of women in development, budgetary allocations made directly to women's programmes have declined as a percentage of total programme expenditure, from 22 per cent in 1982 to 18 per cent in 1984. Supplementary funding from governments and non-governmental donors has been vital to continued support of women's programmes, and has increased as a percentage of expenditures for women's programmes from 13 per cent in 1982 to 26 per cent in 1984.

Between 1982 and 1984 total expenditures on women's programmes reached a total of $141 million. The bulk of this has been for programmes in South Central Asia (33 per cent), East Asia and Pakistan (25 per cent), and Eastern and Southern Africa (25 per cent). The largest percentage of funds has been spent on social services (37 per cent over this same two year period), and applied nutrition/nutrition education (35 per cent). □

"We are no longer asking for favours", "we are asking for our rights." UNICEF 1069/Richardson

ARE YOU A BOY OR GIRL?
I DON'T KNOW
THERE'S ONLY ONE WAY TO FIND OUT
HOW?
WOULD YOU HELP ME WITH THE HOUSEHOLD CHORES?
AHH
YOU'RE A BOY!

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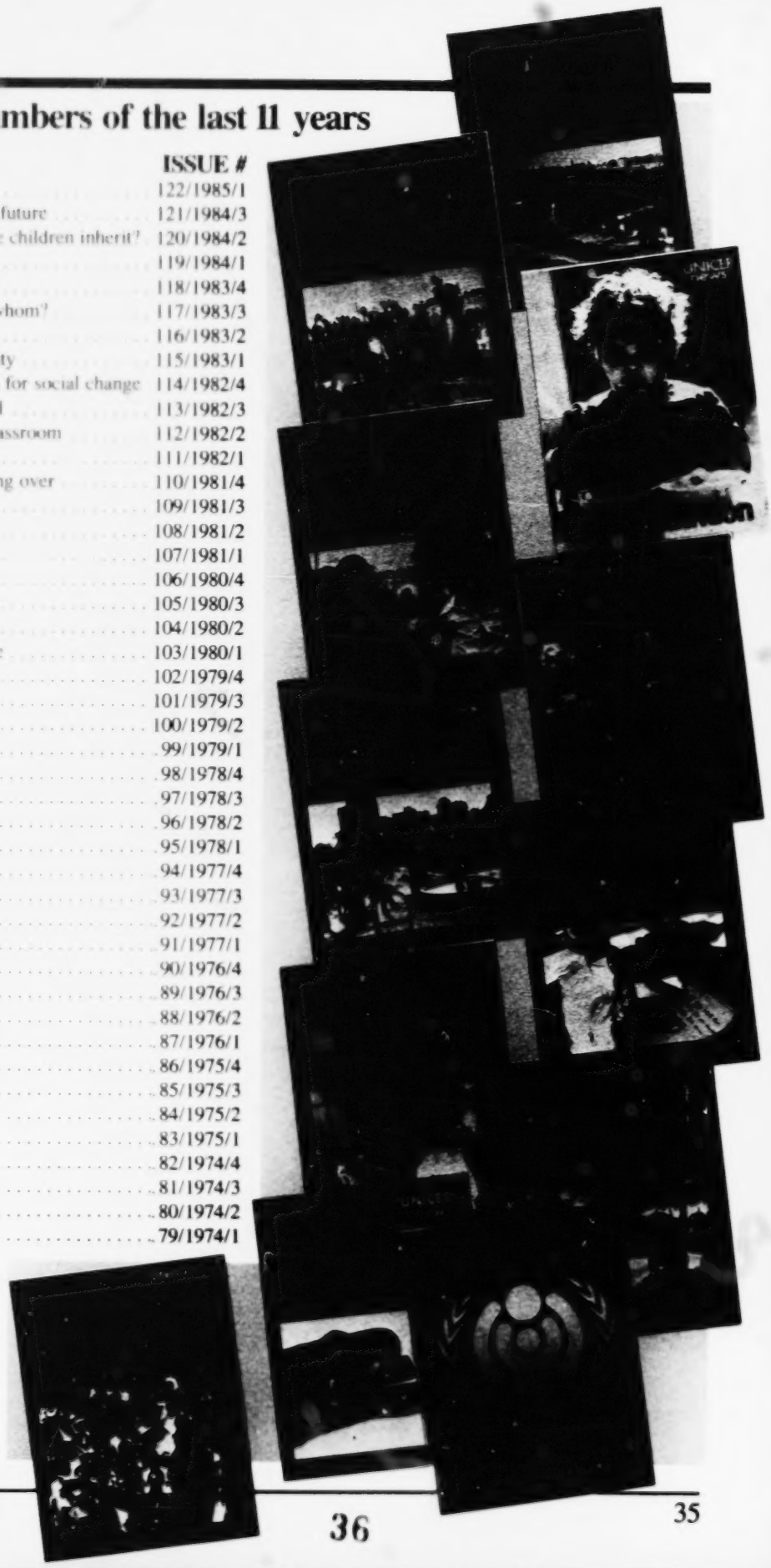

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